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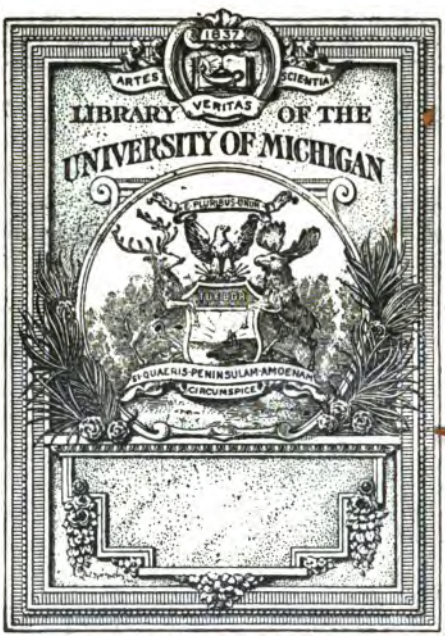
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THE WORKS

OF

HANNAH MORE,

INCLUDING

Several Pieces never before Published.

VOL. V.

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1818.

PRACTICAL PIETY,

OR

THE INFLUENCE

OF THE

RELIGION OF THE HEART

ON THE

CONDUCT OF THE LIFE.

The fear of God begins with the Heart, and purifies and rectifies it; and from the Heart, thus rectified, grows a conformity in the Life, the Words, and the Actions.

Sir Matthew Hale's Contemplations.

201283

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THE FIFTH VOLUME.

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PREFACE.

An eminent professor of our own time modestly declared that he taught chemistry in order that he might learn it. The writer of the following pages might, with far more justice, offer a similar declaration, as an apology for so repeatedly treating on the important topics of religion and morals.

Abashed by the equitable precept,

> Let those teach others who themselves excel—

she is aware, how fairly she is putting it in the power of the reader, to ask, in the searching words of an eminent old prelate, 'They that speak thus and advise thus, do they do thus?' She can defend herself in no other way, than by adopting for a reply the words of the same venerable divine, which immediately follow:—'O that it were not too true. Yet although it be but little that is attained, the very aim is right, and something there is that is done by it. It is better to have such thoughts and desires, than altogether to give them up; and the very desire, if it be serious and sincere, may so much change the habitude of the soul and life, that it is not to be despised.'

The world does not require so much to be informed as reminded. A remembrancer may be almost as useful as an instructor; if his office be more humble, it is scarcely less necessary. The man whose employment it was, statedly to proclaim in

the ear of Philip, REMEMBER THAT THOU ART MORTAL, had his plain admonition been allowed to make its due impression, might have produced a more salutary effect on the royal usurper, than the impassioned orations of his immortal assailant—

> whose resistless eloquence
> Shook th' arsenal and fulmined over Greece,
> To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne.

While the orator boldly strove to check the ambition, and arrest the injustice of the king, the simple herald, barely reminded him, how short would be the reign of injustice, how inevitable and how near was the final period of ambition. Let it be remembered to the credit of the monarch, that while the thunders of the politician were intolerable, the monitor was of his own appointment.

This slight sketch, for it pretends to no higher name, aims only at being plain and practical. Contending solely for those indispensable points, which, by involving present duty, involve future happiness, the writer has avoided, as far as christian sincerity permits, all controverted topics; has shunned whatever might lead to disputation rather than to profit.

We live in an age, when, as Mr. Pope observed of that in which he wrote, it is criminal to be moderate. Would it could not be said that Religion has her parties as well as politics! Those who endeavour to steer clear of all extremes in either, are in danger of being reprobated by both. It is rather a hardship for persons, who have considered it as a christian duty to cultivate a spirit of moderation in thinking, and of candour in judging, that, when these dispositions are brought into action, they frequently

incur a harsher censure than the errors which it was their chief aim to avoid.

Perhaps, therefore, to that human wisdom whose leading object is human applause, it might answer best to be exclusively attached to some one party. On the protection of that party at least, it might in that case reckon; and it would then have the dislike of the opposite class alone to contend against; while those who cannot go all lengths with either, can hardly escape the disapprobation of both.

To apply the remark to the present case:—The author is apprehensive that she may at once be censured by opposite classes of readers, as being too strict and too relaxed:—too much attached to opinions, and too indifferent about them;—as having narrowed the broad field of christianity by labouring to establish its peculiar doctrines;—as having broken down its enclosures by not confining herself to doctrines exclusively;—as having considered morality of too little importance;—as having raised it to an undue elevation,—as having made practice every thing;—as having made it nothing.—

While a catholic spirit is accused of being latitudinarian in one party, it really *is* so in another. In one, it exhibits the character of Christianity on her own grand but correct scale; in the other, it is the offspring of that indifference, which, considering all opinions as of nearly the same value, indemnifies itself for tolerating all, by not attaching itself to any, which, establishing a self-complacent notion of general benevolence, with a view to discredit the narrow spirit of christianity, and adopting a display of that cheap material, liberal sentiment, as opposed to religious strictness, sacrifices true piety to false candour.

Christianity may be said to suffer between two criminals, but it is difficult to determine by which she suffers most;—whether by that uncharitable bigotry which disguises her divine character, and speculatively adopts the faggot and the flames of inquisitorial intolerance; or by that indiscriminate candour, that conceding slackness, which, by stripping her of her appropriate attributes, reduces her to something scarcely worth contending for; to something which, instead of making her the religion of Christ, generalizes her into any religion which may choose to adopt her.—The one distorts her lovely lineaments into caricature, and throws her graceful figure into gloomy shadow; the other, by daubing her over with colours not her own, renders her form indistinct, and obliterates her features. In the first instance, she excites little affection; in the latter she is not recognised.

The writer has endeavoured to address herself as a Christian who must die soon, to Christians who must die certainly. She trusts that she shall not be accused of erecting herself into a censor, but be considered as one who writes with a real consciousness that she is far from having reached the attainments she suggests; with a heartfelt conviction of the danger of holding out a standard too likely to discredit her own practice. She writes not with the assumption of superiority, but with a deep practical sense of the infirmities against which she has presumed to caution others. She wishes to be understood as speaking the language of sympathy, rather than of dictation; of feeling rather than of document. So far from fancying herself exempt from the evils on which she has animadverted, her very feeling of those evils has assisted her in their delineation.

Thus this interior sentiment of her own deficiencies, which might be urged as a disqualification, has, she trusts, enabled her to point out dangers to others.—If the patient cannot lay down rules for the cure of a reigning disease, much less effect the cure; yet from the symptoms common to the same malady, he who labours under it may suggest the necessity of attending to it. He may treat the case feelingly, if not scientifically. He may substitute experience, in default of skill: he may insist on the value of the remedy he has neglected, as well as recommend that from which he has found benefit.

The subjects considered in this volume have been animadverted on, have been in a manner exhausted, by persons before whose names the author bows down with the deepest humility; by able professional instructors, by piety adorned with all the graces of style, and invigorated with all the powers of argument.

Why then, it may be asked, multiply books which may rather incumber the reader than strengthen the cause?—'That the older is better' cannot be disputed. But is not the being 'old' sometimes the reason why the being 'better' is not regarded? Novelty itself is an attraction which but too often supersedes merit. A slighter drapery, if it be a new one, may excite a degree of attention to an object, not paid to it when clad in a richer garb to which the eye has been accustomed.

The author may begin to ask with one of her earliest and most enlightened friends*—'Where is the world into which we were born?' Death has broken most of those connexions which made the

* Dr. Johnson.

honour and the happiness of her youthful days. Fresh links however have continued to attach her to society. She is singularly happy in the affectionate regard of a great number of amiable young persons, who may peruse, with additional attention, sentiments which come recommended to them by the warmth of their own attachment, more than by any claim of merit in the writer. Is there not something in personal knowledge, something in the feelings of endeared acquaintance, which by that hidden association, whence so much of our undefined pleasure is derived, if it does not impart new force to old truths, may excite a new interest in considering truths which are known? Her concern for these engaging persons extends beyond the transient period of present intercourse. It would shed a ray of brightness on her parting hour, if she could hope that any caution here held out, any principle here suggested, any habit here recommended, might be of use to any one of them; when the hand which now guides the pen, can be no longer exerted in their service. This would be remembering their friend in a way which would evince the highest affection in them, which would confer the truest honour on herself.

Barley Wood, March 1*st*, 1811.

CHAPTER I.

Christianity an internal principle.

CHRISTIANITY bears all the marks of a divine original. It came down from heaven, and its gracious purpose is to carry us up thither. Its Author is God. It was foretold from the beginning, by prophecies which grew clearer and brighter as they approached the period of their accomplishment. It was confirmed by miracles which continued till the religion they illustrated was established. It was ratified by the blood of its author. Its doctrines are pure, sublime, consistent. Its precepts just and holy. Its worship is spiritual. Its service reasonable, and rendered practicable by offers of divine aid to human weakness. It is sanctioned by the promise of eternal happiness to the faithful, and the threat of everlasting misery to the disobedient. It had no collusion with power, for power sought to crush it. It could not be in any league with the world, for it set out by declaring itself the enemy of the world. It reprobated its maxims, it showed the vanity of its glories, the danger of its riches, the emptiness of its pleasures.

Christianity, though the most perfect rule of life that ever was devised, is far from being barely a rule of life. A religion consisting of a mere code of laws, might have sufficed for man in a state of innocence. But man who has broken these laws can-

not be saved by a rule which he has violated. What consolation could he find in the perusal of statutes, every one of which, bringing a fresh conviction of his guilt, brings a fresh assurance of his condemnation. The chief object of the Gospel is not to furnish rules for the preservation of innocence, but to hold out the means of salvation to the guilty. It does not proceed upon a supposition but a fact; not upon what might have suited man in a state of purity, but upon what is suitable to him in the exigencies of his fallen state.

This religion does not consist in an external conformity to practices which, though right in themselves, may be adopted from human motives, and to answer secular purposes. It is not a religion of forms, and modes, and decencies. It is being transformed into the image of God. It is being like-minded with Christ. It is considering him as our sanctification, as well as our redemption. It is endeavouring to live to him here that we may live with him hereafter. It is desiring earnestly to surrender our will to his, our heart to the conduct of his spirit, our life to the guidance of his word.

The change in the human heart, which the Scriptures declare to be necessary, they represent to be not so much an old principle improved, as a new one created; not educed out of the former character, but infused into the new one. This change is there expressed in great varieties of language, and under different figures of speech. Its being so frequently described, or figuratively intimated in almost every part of the volume of inspiration, entitles the doctrine itself to reverence, and ought to shield from obloquy the obnoxious terms in which it is sometimes conveyed.

The sacred writings frequently point out the analogy between natural and spiritual things. The same spirit which in the creation of the world moved upon the face of the waters, operates on the human character to produce a new heart and a new life. By this operation the affections and faculties of the man receive a new impulse—his dark understanding is illuminated, his rebellious will is subdued, his irregular desires are rectified, his judgment is informed, his imagination is chastised, his inclinations are sanctified; his hopes and fears are directed to their true and adequate end. Heaven becomes the object of his hopes, an eternal separation from God the object of his fears. His love of the world is transmuted into the love of God. The lower faculties are pressed into the new service. The senses have a higher direction. The whole internal frame and constitution receive a nobler bent; the intents and purposes of the mind a sublimer aim; his aspirations a loftier flight; his vacillating desires find a fixed object; his vagrant purposes a settled home; his disappointed heart a certain refuge. That heart, no longer a worshipper of the world, is struggling to become its conqueror. Our blessed Redeemer, in overcoming the world, bequeathed us his command to overcome it also; but as he did not give the command without the example, so he did not give the example without the offer of a power to obey the command.

Genuine religion demands not merely an external profession of our allegiance to God, but an inward devotedness of ourselves to his service. It is not a recognition, but a dedication. It puts the Christian into a new state of things, a new condition of being. It raises him above the world while he lives in it. It disperses the illusions of sense, by opening his eyes to realities in the place of those shadows-

which he has been pursuing. It presents this world as a scene whose original beauty Sin has darkened and disordered, Man as a helpless and dependant creature, Jesus Christ as the repairer of all the evils which sin has caused, and as our restorer to holiness and happiness. Any religion short of this, any at least, which has not this for its end and object, is not that religion which the Gospel has presented to us, which our Redeemer came down on earth to teach us by his precepts, to illustrate by his example, to confirm by his death, and to consummate by his resurrection.

If Christianity do not always produce these happy effects to the extent here represented, it has always a tendency to produce them. If we do not see the progress to be such as the Gospel annexes to the transforming power of true religion, it is not owing to any defect in the principle, but to the remains of sin in the heart; to the imperfectly subdued corruptions of the Christian. Those who are very sincere are still very imperfect. They evidence their sincerity by acknowledging the lowness of their attainments, by lamenting the remainder of their corruptions. Many an humble Christian whom the world reproaches with being extravagant in his zeal, whom it ridicules for being enthusiastic in his aims, and rigid in his practice, is inwardly mourning on the very contrary ground. He would bear their censure more cheerfully, but that he feels his danger lies in the opposite direction. He is secretly abasing himself before his Maker for not carrying far enough that principle which he is accused of carrying too far. The fault which others find in him is excess. The fault he finds in himself is deficiency. He is, alas! too commonly right. His enemies speak

of him as they hear. He judges of himself as he feels. But though humbled to the dust by the deep sense of his own unworthiness, he is 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' 'He has,' says the venerable Hooker, 'a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power.' His prayer is not for reward but pardon. His plea is not merit but mercy; but then it is mercy made sure to him by the promise of the Almighty to penitent believers.

The mistake of many in religion appears to be, that they do not begin with the beginning. They do not lay their foundation in the persuasion that man is by nature in a state of alienation from God. They consider him rather as an imperfect than a fallen creature. They allow that he requires to be improved, but deny that he requires a thorough renovation of heart.

But genuine Christianity can never be grafted on any other stock than the apostasy of man. The design to reinstate beings who have not fallen; to propose a restoration without a previous loss, a cure where there was no radical disease, is altogether an incongruity which would seem too palpable to require confutation, did we not so frequently see the doctrine of redemption maintained by those who deny that man was in a state to require such a redemption. But would Christ have been sent 'to preach deliverance to the captive,' if there had been no captivity; and 'the opening of the prison to them that were bound,' had there been no prison, had man been in no bondage?

We are aware that many consider the doctrine in question as a bold charge against our Creator. But may we not venture to ask, Is it not a bolder charge against God's goodness to presume that he

had made beings originally wicked; and against God's veracity to believe, that having made such beings he pronounced them 'good?' Is not that doctrine more reasonable which is expressed or implied in every part of Scripture, that the moral corruption of our first parent has been entailed on his whole posterity; that from this corruption (though only punishable for their actual offences) they are no more exempt than from natural death?

We must not, however, think falsely of our nature; we must humble but not degrade it. Our original brightness is obscured, but not extinguished. If we consider ourselves in our natural state, our estimation cannot be too low: when we reflect at what a price we have been bought, we can hardly overrate ourselves in the view of immortality.

If, indeed, the Almighty had left us to the consequences of our natural state, we might, with more colour of reason, have mutinied against his justice. But when we see how graciously he has turned our very lapse into an occasion of improving our condition; how from this evil he was pleased to advance us to a greater good than we had lost; how that life which was forfeited may be restored; how by grafting the redemption of man on the very circumstance of his fall, he has raised him to the capacity of a higher condition than that which he has forfeited, and to a happiness superior to that from which he fell —What an impression does this give us of the immeasurable wisdom and goodness of God, of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The religion which it is the object of these pages to recommend, has been sometimes misunderstood, and not seldom misrepresented. It has been described as an unproductive theory, and ridiculed as a

fanciful extravagance. For the sake of distinction it is here called, *The religion of the Heart. There* it subsists as the fountain of spiritual life; *thence* it sends forth, as from the central seat of its existence, supplies of life and warmth through the whole frame; *there* is the soul of virtue; *there* is the vital principle which animates the whole being of a Christian.

This religion has been the support and consolation of the pious believer in all ages of the church. That it has been perverted both by the cloistered and the uncloistered mystic, not merely to promote abstraction of mind, but inactivity of life, makes nothing against the principle itself. What doctrine of the New Testament has not been made to speak the language of its injudicious advocate, and turned into arms against some other doctrines which it was never meant to oppose?

But if it has been carried to a blamable excess by the pious error of holy men, it has also been adopted by the less innocent fanatic, and abused to the most pernicious purposes. His extravagance has furnished to the enemies of internal religion, arguments or rather invectives, against the sound and sober exercises of genuine piety. They seize every occasion to represent it as if it were criminal, as the foe of morality; ridiculous as the infallible test of an unsound mind; mischievous, as hostile to active virtue, and destructive as the bane of public utility.

But if these charges be really well founded, then were the brightest luminaries of the christian church —then were Horne, and Porteus, and Beveridge; then were Hooker, and Taylor, and Herbert; Hopkins, Leighton, and Usher; Howe, and Baxter; Rid-

ley, Jewel, and Hooper; then were Chrysostome and Augustine, the reformers and the fathers; then were the goodly fellowship of the prophets; then were the noble army of martyrs; then were the glorious company of the apostles; then was the disciple whom Jesus loved; then was Jesus himself—I shudder at the implication—dry speculatists, frantic enthusiasts, enemies to virtue, and subverters of the public weal.

Those who disbelieve, or deride, or reject this inward religion, are much to be compassionated. Their belief that no such principle exists, will, it is to be feared, effectually prevent its existing in themselves, at least, while they make their own state the measure of their general judgment. Not being sensible of their required dispositions in their own hearts, they establish this as a proof of its impossibility in all cases. This persuasion, as long as they maintain it, will assuredly exclude the reception of divine truth. What they assert can be true in no case, cannot be true in their own. Their hearts will be barred against any influence in the power of which they do not believe. They will not desire it, they will not pray for it, except in the Liturgy, *where it is the decided language:* They will not addict themselves to those pious exercises to which it invites them, exercises which it ever loves and cherishes. Thus they expect the end, but avoid the way which leads to it; they indulge the hope of glory, while they neglect or pervert the means of grace. But let not the formal religionist, who has probably never sought, and therefore never obtained, any sense of the spiritual mercies of God, conclude that there is, therefore, no such state. His having no conception of it is no more proof that no such state exists, than

it is a proof, that the cheering beams of a genial climate have no existence, because the inhabitants of the frozen zone never felt them.

Where our own heart and experience do not illustrate these truths practically, so as to afford us some evidence of their reality, let us examine our minds, and faithfully follow up our convictions; let us inquire whether God has really been wanting in the accomplishment of his promises, or whether we have not been sadly deficient in yielding to those suggestions of conscience which are the motions of his spirit? Whether we have not neglected to implore the aids of that spirit; whether we have not, in various instances, resisted them? Let us ask ourselves—have we looked up to our heavenly Father with humble dependance for the supplies of his grace? or have we prayed for these blessings only as a form, and having acquitted ourselves of the form, do we continue to live as if we had not so prayed? Having repeatedly implored his direction, do we endeavour to submit ourselves to its guidance? Having prayed that his will may be done, do we never stoutly set up our own will in contradiction to his?

If, then, we receive not the promised support and comfort, the failure must rest somewhere: it lies between him who has promised, and him to whom the promise was made. There is no other alternative; would it not be blasphemy to transfer the failure to God? Let us not, then, rest till we have cleared up the difficulty. The spirits sink and the faith fails, if, after a continued round of reading and prayer; after having for years conformed to the letter of the command; after having scrupulously

brought in our tale of outward duties, we find ourselves just where we were at setting out.

We complain justly of our own weakness, and truly plead our inability as a reason why we cannot serve God as we ought. This infirmity, its nature and its measure, God knows far more exactly than we know it; yet he knows that, with the help which he offers us, we can both love and obey him, or he never would have made it the qualification of our obtaining his favour. He never would have said, 'give me thy heart'—'seek ye my face'—'add to your faith, virtue'—'have a right heart and a right spirit'—'strengthen the things that remain'—'ye will not come to me that ye might have life'—had not all these precepts a definite meaning, had not all these been practicable duties.

Can we suppose that the omniscient God would have given these unqualified commands to powerless, incapable, unimpressible beings? Can we suppose that he would paralyse his creatures, and then condemn them for not being able to move? He knows, it is true, our natural impotence, but he knows, because he confers, our superinduced strength. There is scarcely a command in the whole Scripture which has not either immediately, or in some other part, a corresponding prayer, and a corresponding promise. If it says in one place '*get* thee a new heart,'—it says in another 'a new heart will I *give* thee;'—and in a third '*make* me a clean heart!' For it is worth observing that a diligent inquirer may trace every where this threefold union. If God *commands* by Saint Paul, 'let not sin reign in your mortal body,' he *promises* by the same apostle, 'sin shall *not* have dominion over you;'—while, to com-

plete the tripartite agreement, he makes David *pray* that his 'sins may not have dominion over him.'

The saints of old, so far from setting up on the stock of their own independent virtue, seem to have had no idea of any light but what was imparted, of any strength but what was communicated to them from above.—Hear their importunate petitions!—'O send forth thy light and thy truth.'—Mark their grateful declarations!—'The Lord is my strength and my salvation!'—Observe their cordial acknowledgments!—'Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name!'

Though we must be careful not to mistake for the divine Agency those impulses which pretend to operate independently of external revelation; which have little reference to it; which set themselves above it; it is however that powerful agency which sanctifies all means, renders all external revelation effectual.—Notwithstanding that all the truths of religion, all the doctrines of salvation are contained in the holy Scriptures, these very Scriptures require the influence of that spirit which dictated them to produce an influential faith. This Spirit, by enlightening the mind, converts the rational persuasion, brings the intellectual conviction of divine truth conveyed in the New Testament, into an operative principle. A man from reading, examining, and inquiring, may attain to such a reasonable assurance of the truth of revelation as will remove all doubts from his own mind, and even enable him to refute the objections of others; but this bare intellectual faith alone will not operate against his corrupt affections, will not cure his besetting sin, will not conquer his rebellious will, and may not therefore be an efficacious principle. A mere historical

faith, the mere evidence of facts with the soundest reasonings and deductions from them, may not be that faith which will fill him with all joy and peace in believing.

An habitual reference to that Spirit which animates the real Christian is so far from excluding, that it strengthens the truth of revelation, but never contradicts it. The word of God is always in unison with his spirit; his spirit is never in opposition to his word. Indeed that this influence is not an imaginary thing, is confirmed by the whole tenor of Scripture. We are aware that we are treading on dangerous, because disputed ground; for among the fashionable curtailments of Scripture doctrines, there is not one truth which has been lopped from the modern creed with a more unsparing hand; not one, the defence of which excites more suspicion against its advocates. But if it had been a mere phantom, should we with such jealous iteration have been cautioned against neglecting or opposing it? If the holy Spirit could not be 'grieved,' might not be 'quenched,' were not likely to be 'resisted;' that very spirit which proclaimed the prohibitions would never have said 'grieve not,' 'quench not,' 'resist not.' The Bible never warns us against imaginary evil, nor courts us to imaginary good. If then we refuse to yield to its guidance, if we reject its directions; if we submit not to its gentle persuasions, for such they are, and not arbitrary compulsions, we shall never attain to that peace and liberty which are the privilege, the promised reward of sincere Christians.

In speaking of that peace which passeth understanding, we allude not to those illuminations and raptures, which, if God has in some instances be-

stowed them, he has no where pledged himself to bestow; but of that rational yet elevated hope which flows from an assured persuasion of the paternal love of our heavenly Father; of that 'secret of the Lord,' which he himself assured us, 'is with them that fear him;' of that life and power of religion which are the privilege of those 'who abide under the shadow of the Almighty;' of those who 'know in whom they have believed;' of those 'who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit;' of those 'who endure as seeing him who is invisible.'

Many faults may be committed where there is nevertheless a sincere desire to please God. Many infirmities are consistent with a cordial love of our Redeemer. Faith may be sincere where it is not strong. But he who can conscientiously say that he seeks the favour of God above every earthly good; that he delights in his service incomparably more than in any other gratification; that to obey him here and to enjoy his presence hereafter is the prevailing desire of his heart; that his chief sorrow is that he loves him no more and serves him no better, such a man requires no evidence that his heart is changed, and his sins forgiven.

For the happiness of a Christian does not consist in mere feelings which may deceive, nor in frames which can be only occasional; but in a settled, calm conviction that God and eternal things have the predominance in his heart; in a clear perception that they have, though with much alloy of infirmity, the supreme, if not undisturbed possession of his mind; in an experimental persuasion that his chief remaining sorrow is, that he does not surrender himself with so complete an acquiescence as he ought to his convictions. These abatements, though sufficient

to keep us humble, are not powerful enough to make us unhappy.

The true measure then to be taken of our state is from a perceptible change in our desires, tastes, and pleasures; from a sense of progress, however small, in holiness of heart and life. This seems to be the safest rule of judging, for if mere feelings were allowed to be the criterion, the presumptuous world would be inflated with spiritual pride from the persuasion of enjoying them; while the humble, from their very humility, might be as unreasonably depressed at wanting such evidences.

The recognition of this divine aid then, involves no presumption, raises no illusion, causes no inflation; it is sober in its principle and rational in its exercise. In establishing the law of God it does not reverse the law of nature, for it leaves us in full possession of those natural faculties which it improves and sanctifies; and so far from inflaming the imagination, its proper tendency is to subdue and regulate it.

A security which outruns our attainments is a most dangerous state, yet it is a state most unwisely coveted. The probable way to be safe hereafter, is not to be presumptuous now. If God graciously vouchsafe us inward consolation, it is only to animate us to farther progress. It is given us for support in our way, and not for settled maintenance in our present condition. If the promises are our aliment, the commandments are our work; and a temperate Christian ought to desire nourishment only in order to carry him through his business. If he so supinely rest on the one as to grow sensual and indolent, he might become not only unwilling but incapacitated for the performance of the other.

We must not expect to live upon cordials, which only serve to inflame without strengthening. Even without these supports, which we are more ready to desire than to put ourselves in the way to obtain, there is an inward peace in an humble trust in God, and in a simple reliance on his word; there is a repose of spirit, a freedom from solicitude in a lowly confidence in him, for which the world has nothing to give in exchange.

On the whole then, the state which we have been describing, is not the dream of the enthusiast; it is not the reverie of the visionary, who renounces prescribed duties for fanciful speculations, and embraces shadows for realities; but it is that sober earnest of Heaven, that reasonable anticipation of eternal felicity, which God is graciously pleased to grant, not partially, nor arbitrarily, but to *all* who diligently seek his face, to *all* to whom his service is freedom, his will a law, his word a delight, his Spirit a guide; to all who love him unfeignedly, to all who devote themselves to him unreservedly, to all who with deep self-abasement, yet with filial confidence, prostrate themselves at the foot of his throne, saying, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us and we shall be safe.

CHAP. II.

Christianity a practical principle.

If God be the author of our spiritual life, the root from which we derive the vital principle, with

daily supplies to maintain this vitality; then the best evidence we can give that we have received something of this principle, is an unreserved dedication of ourselves to the actual promotion of his glory. No man ought to flatter himself that he is in the favour of God, whose life is not consecrated to the service of God. Will it not be the only unequivocal proof of such a consecration, that he be more zealous of good works than those who, disallowing the principle, on which he performs them, do not even pretend to be actuated by any such motive?

The finest theory never yet carried any man to Heaven. A religion of notions which occupies the mind, without filling the heart, may obstruct, but cannot advance the salvation of men. If these notions are false, they are most pernicious; if true and not operative, they aggravate guilt; if unimportant though not unjust, they occupy the place which belongs to nobler objects, and sink the mind below its proper level; substituting the things which only ought not to be left undone, in the place of those which ought to be done; and causing the grand essentials not to be done at all. Such a religion is not that which Christ came to teach mankind.

All the doctrines of the gospel are practical principles. The word of God was not written, the Son of God was not incarnate, the spirit of God was not given, only that Christians might obtain right views, and possess just notions. Religion is something more than mere correctness of intellect, justness of conception, and exactness of judgment. It is a life-giving principle. It must be infused into the habit, as well as govern the understanding; it must regulate the will as well as direct the creed. It must not only cast the opinions into a new frame, but the

heart into a new mould. It is a transforming as well as a penetrating principle. It changes the tastes, gives activity to the inclinations, and together with a new heart, produces a new life.

Christianity enjoins the same temper, the same spirit, the same dispositions, on all its real professors. The act, the performance, must depend on circumstances which do not depend on us. The power of doing good is withheld from many, from whom, however, the reward will not be withheld. If the external act constituted the whole value of christian virtue, then must the Author of all good be himself the author of injustice, by putting it out of the power of multitudes to fulfil his own commands. In principles, in tempers, in fervent desires, in holy endeavours, consist the very essence of christian duty.

Nor must we fondly attach ourselves to the practice of some particular virtue, or value ourselves exclusively on some favourite quality; nor must we wrap ourselves up in the performance of some individual actions, as if they formed the sum of christian duty. But we must embrace the whole law of God in all its aspects, bearings and relations. We must bring no fancies, no partialities, no prejudices, no exclusive choice or rejection into our religion, but take it as we find it, and obey it as we receive it, as it is exhibited in the Bible without addition, curtailment, or adulteration.

Nor must we pronounce on a character by a single action really bad, or apparently good; if so, Peter's denial would render him the object of our execration, while we should have judged favourably of the prudent economy of Judas. The catastrophe of the latter, who does not know? while the

other became a glorious martyr to that master whom, in a moment of infirmity, he had denied.

A piety altogether spiritual, disconnected with all outward circumstances; a religion of pure meditation and abstracted devotion, was not made for so compound, so imperfect a creature as man. There have, indeed, been a few sublime spirits, not 'touched but rapt,' who, totally cut off from the world, seem almost to have literally soared above this terrene region, who almost appear to have stolen the fire of the Seraphim, and to have had no business on earth, but to keep alive the celestial flame. They would, however, have approximated more nearly to the example of their divine master, the great standard and only perfect model, had they combined a more diligent discharge of the active duties and benefices of life with their high devotional attainments.

But while we are in little danger of imitating, let us not too harshly censure the pious error of these sublimated spirits. Their number is small. Their example is not catching. Their etherial fire is not likely, by spreading, to inflame the world. The world will take due care not to come in contact with it, while its distant light and warmth may cast, accidentally, a not unuseful ray on the cold-hearted and the worldly.

But from this small number of refined but inoperative beings, we do not intend to draw our notions of practical piety. God did not make a religion for these few exceptions to the general state of the world, but for the world at large; for beings active, busy, restless; whose activity he, by his word, diverts into its proper channels; whose busy spirit is there directed to the common good; whose restlessness, indicating the unsatisfactoriness of all they

find on earth, he points to a higher destination. Were total seclusion and abstraction designed to have been the general state of the world, God would have given man other laws, other rules, other faculties, and other employments.

There is a class of visionary but pious writers who seem to shoot as far beyond the mark, as mere moralists fall short of it. Men of low views and gross minds may be said to be wise *below* what is written, while those of too subtle refinement are wise *above* it. The one grovel in the dust from the inertness of their intellectual faculties; while the others are lost in the clouds by stretching them beyond their appointed limits. The one build spiritual castles in the air, instead of erecting them on the 'holy ground' of Scripture; the other lay their foundation in the sand instead of resting it on the Rock of Ages. Thus, the superstructure of both is equally unsound.

God is the fountain from which all the streams of goodness flow; the centre from which all the rays of blessedness diverge. All our actions are, therefore, only good, as they have a reference to Him: the streams must revert back to their fountain, the rays must converge again to their centre.

If love of God be the governing principle, this powerful spring will actuate all the movements of the rational machine. The essence of religion does not so much consist in actions as affections. Though right actions, therefore, as from an excess of courtesy they are commonly termed, may be performed where there are no right affections; yet are they a mere carcass; utterly destitute of the soul, and, therefore, of the substance of virtue. But neither can affections substantially and truly subsist without

producing right actions: for never let it be forgot-ten, that a good inclination which has not life and vigour sufficient to ripen into act when the occasion presents itself, and a right action which does not grow out of a sound principle, will neither of them have any place in the account of real goodness. A good inclination [illegible] contrary to sin, but a mere inclination [illegible] subdue sin.

The love of God, as it is the source of every [illegible] and feeling, so it is the only principle which [illegible] involves the love of our fellow creatures. As men we do not love man. There is [illegible] of sen- [illegible] of friends and fa- [illegible] but not of man [illegible] without [illegible] but we do not [illegible] fortune. [illegible] we [illegible] We [illegible] but we can [illegible] not fear of [illegible] but [illegible] that we [illegible] nature. [illegible] it seems in- [illegible] want [illegible] spiritual [illegible] proceed [illegible] commanding [illegible] of vir- [illegible]

terion of the state of the heart; for who is there, who does not occasionally do them? Having made some progress in attaining this disposition, we must not sit down satisfied with propensities and inclinations to virtuous actions, while we rest short of their actual exercise. If the principle be that of sound Christianity, it will never be inert. While we shall never do good with any great effect, till we labour to be conformed, in some measure, to the image of God; we shall best evince our having obtained something of that conformity, by a course of steady and active obedience to God.

Every individual should bear in mind, that he is sent into this world to act a part in it. And though one may have a more splendid, and another a more obscure part assigned him, yet the actor of each is equally, is awfully accountable. Though God is not a hard, he is an exact master. His service, though not a severe, is a reasonable service. He accurately proportions his requisitions to his gifts. If he does not expect that one talent should be as productive as five, yet to a single talent a proportionable responsibility is annexed.

He who has said, 'Give me thy heart,' will not be satisfied with less; he will not accept the praying lips, nor the mere hand of charity as substitutes.

A real Christian will be more just, sober, and charitable than other men, though he will not rest for salvation on justice, sobriety, or charity. He will perform the duties they enjoin, in the spirit of christianity, as instances of devout obedience, as evidences of a heart devoted to God.

All virtues, it cannot be too often repeated, are sanctified or unhallowed according to the principle, which dictates them; and will be accepted or re-

jected accordingly. This principle kept in due exercise, becomes a habit, and every act strengthens the inclination, adding vigour to the principle and pleasure to the performance.

We cannot be said to be real Christians, till religion become our animating motive, our predominating principle and pursuit, as much as worldly things are the predominating motive, principle, and pursuit of worldly men.

New converts, it is said, are most zealous, but they are not always the most persevering. If their tempers are warm; and they have only been touched on the side of their passions, they start eagerly, march rapidly, and are full of confidence in their own strength. They too often judge others with little charity, and themselves with little humility. While they accuse those who move steadily of standing still, they fancy their own course will never be slackened. If their conversion be not solid, religion, in losing its novelty, loses its power. Their speed declines. Nay it will be happy if their motion become not retrograde. Those who are truly sincere, will commonly be persevering. If their speed is less eager, it is more steady. As they know their own heart more, they discover its deceitfulness, and learn to distrust themselves. As they become more humble in spirit, they become more charitable in judging. As they grow more firm in principle they grow more exact in conduct.

The rooted habits of a religious life may indeed lose their prominence because they are become more indented. If they are not embossed it is because they are burnt in. Where there is uniformity and consistency in the whole character, there will be little relief in an individual action. A good deed will

be less striking in an established Christian than a deed less good in one who has been previously careless; good actions being his expected duty and his ordinary practice. Such a Christian indeed, when his right habits cease to be new and striking, may fear that he is declining: but his quiet and confirmed course is a surer evidence than the more early starts of charity, or fits of piety, which may have drawn more attention, and obtained more applause.

Again;—We should cultivate most assiduously, because the work is so difficult, those graces which are most opposite to our natural temper; the value of our good qualities depending much on their being produced by the victory over some natural wrong propensity. The implantation of a virtue is the eradication of a vice. It would cost one man more to keep down a rising passion than to do a brilliant deed. It will try another more to keep back a sparkling but corrupt thought, which his wit had suggested but which religion checks, than it would to give a large sum in charity. A real Christian being deeply sensible of the worthlessness of any actions which do not spring from the genuine fountain, will aim at such an habitual conformity to the divine image, that to perform all acts of justice, charity, kindness, temperance, and every kindred virtue, may become the temper, the habitual, the abiding state of his heart; that like natural streams they may flow spontaneously from the living source.

Practical Christianity then, is the actual operation of christian principles. It is lying on the watch for occasions to exemplify them. It is 'exercising ourselves unto Godliness.' A Christian cannot tell in the morning, what opportunities he may have of doing good during the day; but if he

be a real Christian, he can tell that he will try to keep his heart open, his mind prepared, his affections alive to do whatever may occur in the way of duty. He will, as it were, stand in the way to receive the orders of providence. Doing good is his vocation. Nor does the young artisan bind himself by firmer articles to the rigid performance of his master's work, than the indentured Christian to the active service of that Divine master, who himself 'went about doing good.' He rejects no duty which comes within the sphere of his calling, nor does he think the work he is employed in a good one, if he might be doing a better. His having well acquitted himself of a good action, is so far from furnishing him with an excuse for avoiding the next, that it is a new reason for his embarking in it. He looks not at the work which he has accomplished; but on that which he has to do. His views are always prospective. His charities are scarcely limited by his power. His will knows no limits. His fortune may have bounds: His benevolence has none. He is, in mind and desire, the benefactor of every miserable man. His heart is open to all the distressed; to the household of faith it overflows. Where the heart is large, however small the ability, a thousand ways of doing good will be invented. Christian charity is a great enlarger of means. Christian self-denial negatively accomplishes the purpose of the favourites of fortune in the fables of the nursery—if it cannot fill the purse by a wish, it will not empty it by a vanity. It provides for others by abridging from itself. Having carefully defined what is necessary and becoming, it allows of no encroachment on its definition. Superfluities it will lop, vanities it will cut off. The deviser of liberal things will find means

of effecting them, which to the indolent appear incredible, to the covetous impossible. Christian beneficence takes a large sweep. That circumference cannot be small of which God is the centre. Nor does religious charity in a Christian stand still because not kept in motion by the main spring of the world. Money may fail, but benevolence will be going on. If he cannot relieve want, he may mitigate sorrow. He may warn the inexperienced, he may instruct the ignorant, he may confirm the doubting. The Christian will find out the cheapest way of *being* good as well as of *doing* good. If he cannot give money, he may exercise a more difficult virtue; he may forgive injuries. Forgiveness is the economy of the heart. A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits. It also puts the soul into a frame, which makes the practice of other virtues easy. The achievement of a hard duty is a great abolisher of difficulties. If great occasions do not arise, he will thankfully seize on small ones. If he cannot glorify God by serving others, he knows that he has always something to do at home; some evil temper to correct, some wrong propensity to reform, some crooked practice to straighten. He will never be at a loss for employment, while there is a sin or misery in the world; he will never be idle, while there is a distress to be relieved in another, or a corruption to be cured in his own heart. We have employments assigned to us for every circumstance in life. When we are alone, we have our thoughts to watch; in the family, our tempers; in company, our tongues.

What an example of disinterested goodness and unbounded kindness have we in our heavenly Fa-

ther, who is merciful over all his works; who distributes common blessings without distinction; who bestows the necessary refreshments of life, the shining sun and the refreshing shower, without waiting, as we are apt to do, for personal merit, or attachment or gratitude; who does not look out for desert, but want as a qualification for his favours; who does not afflict willingly; who delights in the happiness, and desires the salvation of all his children; who dispenses his daily munificence and bears with our daily offences; who in return for our violation of his laws, supplies our necessities; who waits patiently for our repentance, and even solicits us to have mercy on our own souls!

What a model for our humble imitation is that Divine person who was clothed with our humanity; who dwelt among us, that the pattern being brought near might be rendered more engaging, the conformity be made more practicable; whose whole life was one unbroken series of universal charity; who in his complicated bounties never forgot that man is compounded both of soul and body; who after teaching the multitude, fed them; who repulsed none for being ignorant; was impatient with none for being dull; despised none for being contemned by the world; rejected none for being sinners; who encouraged those whose importunity others censured; who in healing sicknesses converted souls; who gave bread and forgave injuries!

It will be the endeavour of the sincere Christian, to illustrate his devotions in the morning by his actions during the day. He will try to make his conduct a practica exposition of the divine prayer which made a part of them. He will desire to hallow the name of God,' to promote the enlargement

and ' the coming' of the ' kingdom' of Christ. He will endeavour to do and to suffer his whole will; ' to forgive' as he himself trusts that he is forgiven. He will resolve to avoid that ' temptation' into which he had been praying ' not to be led;' and he will labour to shun the ' evil' from which he had been begging to be ' delivered.' He thus makes his prayers as practical as the other parts of his religion; and labours to render his conduct as spiritual as his prayers. The commentary and the text are of reciprocal application.

If this gracious Saviour has left us a perfect model for our devotion in his prayer, he has left a model no less perfect for our practice in his sermon. This Divine exposition has been sometimes misunderstood. It was not so much a supplement to a defective law, as the restoration of the purity of a perfect law from the corrupt interpretations of its blind expounders. These persons had ceased to consider it as forbidding the principle of sin, and as only forbidding the act. Christ restores it to its original meaning, spreads it out in its due extent, shows the largeness of its dimensions and the spirit of its institution. He unfolds all its motions, tendencies and relations. Not contenting himself, as human legislators are obliged to do, to prohibit a man the act which is injurious to others, but the inward temper which is prejudicial to himself.

There cannot be a more striking instance, how emphatically every doctrine of the gospel has a reference to practical goodness, than is exhibited by St. Paul in that magnificent picture of the resurrection, in his epistle to the Corinthians, which our church has happily selected, for the consolation of survivers at the last closing scene of mortality.

After an inference as triumphant, as it is logical, that because 'Christ is risen, we shall rise also;' after the most philosophical illustration of the raising of the body from the dust, by the process of grain sown in the earth, and springing up into a new mode of existence; after describing the subjugation of all things to the Redeemer, and his laying down the mediatorial kingdom; after sketching with a seraph's pencil, the relative glories of the celestial and terrestrial bodies; after exhausting the grandest images of created nature, and the dissolution of nature itself;—after such a display of the solemnities of the great day, as makes this world, and all its concerns shrink into nothing: in such a moment, when, if ever, the rapt spirit might be supposed too highly wrought for precept and admonition, the apostle, wound up as he was, by the energies of inspiration, to the immediate view of the glorified state—the last trumpet sounding—the change from mortal to immortality effected in the twinkling of an eye—the sting of death drawn out—victory snatched from the grave—then, by a turn as surprising as it is beautiful, he draws a conclusion as unexpectedly practical as his premises were grand and awful: '*Therefore*, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable; always abounding in the work of the Lord.' Then at once, by another quick transition, resorting from the duty to the reward, and winding up the whole with an argument as powerful, as his rhetoric had been sublime, he adds—'Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

CHAP. III.

Mistakes in Religion.

To point out with precision all the mistakes which exist in the present day, on the awful subject of religion, would far exceed the limits of this small work. No mention therefore is intended to be made of the opinions or the practice of any particular body of people; nor will any notice be taken of any of the peculiarities of the numerous sects and parties which have risen up among us. It will be sufficient for the present purpose, to hazard some slight remarks on a few of those common classes of characters, which belong more or less to most general bodies.

There are, among many others, three different sorts of religious professors. The religion of one consists in a sturdy defence of what they themselves call orthodoxy, an attendance on public worship, and a general decency of behaviour. In their views of religion, they are not a little apprehensive of excess, not perceiving that their danger lies on the other side. They are far from rejecting faith or morals, but are somewhat afraid of *believing* too much, and a little scrupulous about *doing* too much, lest the former be suspected of fanaticism, and the latter of singularity. These Christians consider religion as a point, which they, by their regular observances, having attained, there is nothing further required but to maintain the point they have reached, by a repetition of the same observances. They are therefore satisfied to remain stationary, considering that whoever has obtained his end, is of

course saved the labour of pursuit; he is to keep his ground without troubling himself in searching after imaginary perfection.

These frugal Christians are afraid of nothing so much as superfluity in their love, and supererogation in their obedience. This kind of fear however is always superfluous, but most especially in those who are troubled with the apprehension. They are apt to weigh in the nicely poised scales of scrupulous exactness, the duties which must of hard necessity be done, and those which without much risk may be left undone; compounding for a larger indulgence by the relinquishment of a smaller; giving up, through fear, a trivial gratification to which they are less inclined, and snatching doubtingly, as an equivalent, at one they like better. The gratification in both cases being perhaps such as a manly mind would hardly think worth contending for, even were religion out of the question. Nothing but love to God can conquer love of the world. One grain of that divine principle would make the scale of self-indulgence kick the beam.

These persons dread nothing so much as enthusiasm. Yet if to look for effects without their predisposing causes; to depend for heaven on that to which heaven was never promised, be features of enthusiasm, then are they themselves enthusiasts.

The religion of a second class, we have already described in the two preceding chapters. It consists in a heart devoted to its Maker; inwardly changed in its temper and disposition, yet deeply sensible of its remaining infirmities; continually aspiring however to higher improvements in faith, hope and charity, and thinking that 'the greatest of these is *charity*.' These, by the former class, are reckoned

enthusiasts, but they are in fact, if Christianity be true, acting on the only rational principles. If the doctrines of the gospel have any solidity, if its promises have any meaning, these Christians are building on no false ground. They hope that submission to the power of God, obedience to his laws, compliance with his will, trust in his word, are through the efficacy of the eternal spirit, real evidences, because they are vital acts of genuine faith in Jesus Christ. If they profess not to place their reliance on works, they are however more zealous in performing them than the others, who professing to depend on their good deeds for salvation, are not always diligent in securing it by the very means which they themselves establish to be alone effectual.

There is a third class—the high flown professor, who looks down from the giddy heights of antinomian delusion on the other two, abhors the one, and despises the other, concludes that the one is lost, and the other in a fair way to be so. Though perhaps not living himself in any course of immorality, which requires the sanction of such doctrines, he does not hesitate to imply in his discourse, that virtue is heathenish, and good works superfluous if not dangerous. He does not consider that though the gospel is an act of oblivion to penitent sinners, yet it no where promises pardon to those who continue to live in a state of rebellion against God, and of disobedience to his laws. He forgets to insist to others that it is of little importance even to believe that sin is an evil (which however they do not always believe) while they persist to live in it; that to know every thing of duty except the doing it, is to offend God with an aggravation from which ignorance itself is exempt. It is not giving ourselves

up to Christ in a nameless, inexplicable way, which will avail us. God loves an humble, not an audacious faith. To suppose that the blood of Christ redeems us from sin, while sin continues to pollute the soul, is to suppose an impossibility; to maintain that it is effectual for the salvation, and not for the sanctification of the sinner, is to suppose that it acts like an amulet, an incantation, a talisman, which is to produce its effect by operating on the imagination, and not on the disease.

The religion which mixes with human passions, and is set on fire by them, will make a stronger blaze than that light which is from above, which sheds a steady and lasting brightness on the path, and communicates a sober but durable warmth to the heart. It is equable and constant; while the other, like culinary fire, fed by gross materials, is extinguished the sooner from the fierceness of the flame.

That religion which is merely seated in the passions, is not only liable to wear itself out by its own impetuosity, but to be driven out by some other passion. The dominion of violent passions is short. They dispossess each other. When religion has had its day, it gives way to the next usurper. Its empire is no more solid than it is lasting, when principle and reason do not fix it on the throne.

The first of the above classes consider prudence as the paramount virtue in religion. Their antipodes, the flaming professors, believe a burning zeal to be the exclusive grace. *They* revere saint Paul's collocation of the three christian graces, and think that the greatest of these is *faith*. Though even in respect of this grace, their conduct and conversation too often give us reason to lament that

they do not bear in mind its genuine and distinctive properties. Their faith instead of working by love, seems to be adopted from a notion that it leaves the Christian nothing to do, rather than because it is its nature to lead him to do more and better than other men.

In this case, as in many others, that which is directly contrary to what is wrong, is wrong also. If each opponent would only barter half his favourite quality with the favourite quality of the other, both parties would approach nearer to the truth. They might even furnish a complete Christian between them, that is, provided the zeal of the one was sincere, and the prudence of the other honest. But the misfortune is, each is as proud of not possessing the quality he wants, because his adversary has it, as he is proud of possessing that of which the other is destitute, and *because* he is destitute of it.

Among the many mistakes in religion, it is commonly thought that there is something so unintelligible, absurd, and fanatical in the term conversion, that those who employ it run no small hazard of being involved in the ridicule it excites. It is seldom used but ludicrously, or in contempt. This arises partly from the levity and ignorance of the censurer, but perhaps as much from the imprudence and enthusiasm of those, who have absurdly confined it to real or supposed instances of sudden or miraculous changes from profligacy to piety. But surely, with reasonable people, we run no risk in asserting that he, who being awakened by any of those various methods which the Almighty uses to bring his creatures to the knowledge of himself; who seeing the corruptions that are in the world, and feeling those with which his own heart abounds,

is brought, whether gradually or more rapidly from an evil heart of unbelief, to a lively faith in the Redeemer; from a life, not only of gross vice, but of worldliness and vanity, to a life of progressive piety; whose humility keeps pace with his progress; who, though his attainments are advancing, is so far from counting himself to have attained, that he presses onward with unabated zeal, and evinces, by the change in his conduct, the change that has taken place in his heart—such a one is surely as sincerely converted, and the effect is as much produced by the same divine energy, as if some instantaneous revolution in his character had given it a miraculous appearance. The doctrines of Scripture are the same now as when David called them, 'a law *converting* the soul, and giving *light* to the eyes.' This is perhaps the most accurate and comprehensive definition of the change for which we are contending, for it includes both the illumination of the understanding, and the alteration in the disposition.

If then this obnoxious expression signify nothing more nor less than that change of character which consists in turning from the world to God, however the *term* may offend, there is nothing ridiculous in the *thing*. Now, as it is not for the term which we contend, but for the principle conveyed by it; so it is the principle and not the term, which is the real ground of objection; though it is a little inconsistent that many who would sneer at the idea of conversion, would yet take it extremely ill if it were suspected that their hearts were not turned to God.

Reformation, a term against which no objection is ever made, would, if words continued to retain their primitive signification, convey the same idea. For it is plain that to *reform* means to make anew.

In the present use, however, it does not convey the same meaning in the same extent, nor indeed does it imply the operation of the same principle. Many are reformed on human motives, many are partially reformed; but only those who, as our great poet says, are 'reformed altogether,' are converted. There is no complete reformation in the conduct effected without a revolution in the heart. Ceasing from some sins; retaining others in a less degree; or adopting such as are merely creditable; or flying from one sin to another; or ceasing from the external act without any internal change of disposition, is not christian reformation. The new principle must abolish the old habit; the rooted inclination must be subdued by the substitution of an opposite one. The natural bias must be changed. The actual offence will no more be pardoned than cured, if the inward corruption be not eradicated. To be 'alive unto God through Jesus Christ' must follow 'the death unto sin.' There cannot be new aims and ends where there is not a new principle to produce them. We shall not choose a new path until a light from heaven direct our choice and 'guide our feet.' We shall not 'run the way of God's commandments,' till God himself enlarge our heart.

We do not, however, insist that the change required is such as precludes the possibility of falling into sin; but it is a change which fixes in the soul such a disposition as shall make sin a burden, as shall make the desire of pleasing God the governing desire of a man's heart; as shall make him hate the evil which he does; as shall make the lowness of his attainments the subject of his deepest sorrow. A Christian has hopes and fears, cares and temptations, inclinations and desires, as well as other

men. God in changing the heart does not extinguish the passions. Were that the case, the christian life would cease to be a warfare.

We are often deceived by that partial improvement which appears in the victory over some one bad quality. But we must not mistake the removal of a symptom for a radical cure of the disease. An occasional remedy might remove an accidental sickness, but it requires a general regimen to renovate the diseased constitution.

It is the natural but melancholy history of the unchanged heart, that from youth to advanced years, there is no other revolution in the character but such as increases both the number and quality of its defects: that the levity, vanity, and self-sufficiency of the young man is carried into advanced life, and only meet, and mix with the defects of a mature period: that, instead of crying out with the royal prophet, 'O remember not my old sins,' he is inflaming his reckoning by new ones: that age, protracting all the faults of youth, furnishes its own contingent of vices: that sloth, suspicion, and covetousness, swell the account which religion has not been called in to cancel: that the world, though it has lost the power to delight, has yet lost nothing of its power to enslave. Instead of improving in candour by the inward sense of its own defects, that very consciousness makes him less tolerant of the defects of others, and more suspicious of their apparent virtues. His charity in a warmer season having failed to bring him in that return of gratitude for which it was partly performed, and having never flowed from the genuine spring, is dried up. His friendships having been formed on worldly principles, or interest, or ambition, or convivial hi-

larity, fail him. One must make some sacrifices to the world, is the prevailing language of the nominal Christian. 'What will the world pay you for your sacrifices?' replies the real Christian. Though he finds that the world is insolvent, that it pays nothing of what is promised, for it cannot bestow what it does not possess—happiness; yet he continues to cling to it almost as confidently as if it had never disappointed him. Were we called upon to name the object under the sun which excites the deepest commiseration in the heart of christian sensibility, which includes in itself the most affecting incongruities, which contains the sum and substance of real human misery, we should not hesitate to say, *an irreligious old age.* The mere debility of declining years, even the hopelessness of decrepitude, in the pious, though they excite sympathy, yet it is the sympathy of tenderness unmixed with distress. We take and give comfort, from the cheering persuasion that the exhausted body will soon cease to clog its immortal companion; that the dim and failing eyes will soon open on a world of glory. Dare we paint the reverse of the picture? Dare we suffer the imagination to dwell on the opening prospects of hoary impiety? Dare we figure to ourselves that the weakness, the miseries, the terrors, we are now commiserating, are ease, are peace, are happiness, compared with the unutterable perspective?

There is a fatal way of lulling the conscience by entertaining diminishing thoughts of sins long since committed. We persuade ourselves to forget them, and we therefore persuade ourselves that they are not remembered by God. But though distance diminishes objects to the eye of the beholder, it does not actually lessen them. Their real magnitude re-

mains the same. Deliver us, merciful God! from the delusion of believing that secret sins, of which the world has no cognizance, early sins, which the world has forgotten, but which are known to 'Him with whom we have to do,' become by secrecy and distance as if they had never been. 'Are not these things noted in THY book?' Perhaps if we remember them, God may forget them, especially if our remembrance be such as to induce a sound repentance. If we remember them not, he assuredly will. The holy contrition which should accompany this remembrance, while it will not abate our humble trust in our compassionate Redeemer, will keep our conscience tender, and our heart watchful.

We do not deny that there is frequently much kindness and urbanity, much benevolence and generosity, in men who do not even pretend to be religious. These qualities often flow from constitutional feeling, natural softness of temper, and warm affections; often from an elegant education, that best *human* sweetener, and polisher of social life. We feel a tender regret as we exclaim, 'what a fine soil would such dispositions afford to plant religion in!' Well bred persons are accustomed to respect all the decorums of society, to connect inseparably the ideas of personal comfort with public esteem, of generosity with credit, of order with respectability. They have a keen sense of dishonour, and are careful to avoid every thing that may bring the shadow of discredit on their name. Public opinion is the breath by which they live, the standard by which they act; of course they would not lower by gross misconduct, that standard on which their happiness depends. They have been taught to respect themselves; this they can do with more secu-

rity while they can retain, on this half-way principle, the respect of others.

In some who make further advances towards religion, we continue to see it in that same low degree which we have always observed. It is dwarfish and stunted, it makes no shoots. Though it gives some signs of life, it does not grow. By a tame and spiritless round, or rather by this fixed and immoveable position, we rob ourselves of that fair reward of peace and joy which attends on an humble consciousness of progress; on the feeling of difficulties conquered; on a sense of the divine favour. That religion which is profitable, is commonly perceptible. Nothing supports a traveller in his christian course like the conviction that he is getting on; like looking back on the country he has passed; and, above all, like the sense of that protection which has hitherto carried him on, and of that grace which has promised to support him to the end.

The proper motion of the renewed heart is still directed upward. True religion is of an aspiring nature, continually tending towards that heaven from whence it was transplanted. Its top is high because its root is deep. It is watered by a perennial fountain; in its most flourishing state it is always capable of further growth. Real goodness proves itself to be such by a continual desire to be better. No virtue on earth is ever in a complete state. Whatever stage of religion any man has attained, if he be satisfied to rest in that stage, we would not call that man religious. The Gospel seems to consider the highest degree of goodness as the lowest with which a Christian ought to sit down satisfied. We cannot be said to be finished in any christian grace,

because there is not one which may not be carried further than we have carried it. This promotes the double purpose of keeping us humble as to our present stage, and of stimulating us to something higher which we may hope to attain.

That superficial thing, which by mere people of the world is dignified by the appellation of religion, though it brings just that degree of credit which makes part of the system of worldly Christians; neither brings comfort for this world, nor security for the next. Outward observances, indispensable as they are, are not religion. They are the accessory, but not the principal; they are important aids and adjuncts, but not the thing itself; they are its aliment but not its life, the fuel but not the flame, the scaffolding but not the edifice. Religion can no more subsist merely by them, than it can subsist without them. They are divinely appointed, and must be conscientiously observed; but observed as a means to promote an end, and not as an end in themselves.

The heartless homage of formal worship, where the living power does not give life to the form, the cold compliment of ceremonial attendance, without the animating principle, as it will not bring peace to our own mind, so neither will it satisfy a jealous God. That God whose eye is on the heart, 'who trieth the reins and searcheth the spirits,' will not be satisfied that we make him little more than a nominal deity, while the world is the real object of our worship. Such persons seem to have almost the whole body of performance; all they want is the soul. They are constant in their devotions, but the heart, which even the heathens esteemed the best part of the sacrifice, they keep away. They read

the Scriptures, but rest in the letter, instead of trying themselves by its spirit. They consider it as an enjoined task, but not as the quick and powerful instrument put into their hands for the critical dissection of 'piercing and dividing asunder the soul and spirit;' not as the penetrating 'discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' These well-intentioned persons seem to spend no inconsiderable portion of time in religious exercises, and yet complain that they make little progress. They almost seem to insinuate as if the Almighty did not keep his word with them, and manifest that religion to them is not 'pleasantness,' nor her 'paths peace.'

Of such may we not ask, would you not do better to examine than to complain? to inquire whether you do, indeed, possess a heart which, notwithstanding its imperfections, is sincerely devoted to God? He who does not desire to be perfect, is not sincere. Would you not do well to convince yourselves that God is not unfaithful? that his promises do not fail? that his goodness is not slackened? May you not be entertaining some secret infidelity, practising some latent disobedience, withholding some part of your heart, neglecting to exercise that faith, subtracting something from that devotedness, to which a Christian should engage himself, and to which the promises of God are annexed? Do you indulge no propensities contrary to his will? Do you never resist the dictates of his spirit? never shut your eyes to its illumination, nor your heart to its influences? Do you not indulge some cherished sin which obscures the light of grace, some practice which obstructs the growth of virtue, some distrust which chills the warmth of love? The discovery will repay the search, and if you succeed in

this scrutiny, let not the detection discourage but stimulate.

If, then, you resolve to take up religion in earnest, especially if you have actually adopted its customary forms, rest not in such low attainments as will afford neither present peace nor future happiness. To know Christianity only in its external forms, and its internal dissatisfactions, its superficial appearances without, and its disquieting apprehensions within; to be desirous of standing well with the world as a Christian, yet to be unsupported by a well-founded christian hope; to depend for happiness on the opinion of men, instead of the favour of God; to go on dragging through the mere exercises of piety, without deriving from them real strength or solid peace; to live in the dread of being called an enthusiast, by outwardly exceeding in religion, and in secret consciousness of falling short of it; to be conformed to the world's view of Christianity, rather than to aspire to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, is a state, not of pleasure but of penalty, not of conquest but of hopeless conflict, not of ingenuous love but of tormenting fear. It is knowing religion only as the captive in a foreign land knows the country in which he is a prisoner. He hears from the cheerful natives of its beauties, but is himself ignorant of every thing beyond his own gloomy limits. He hears of others as free and happy, yet feels nothing himself but the rigours of incarceration.

The christian character is little understood by the votaries of the world; if it were, they would be struck with its grandeur. It is the very reverse of that meanness and pusillanimity, that abject spirit

and those narrow views, which those who know it not ascribe to it.

A Christian lives at the height of his being; not only at the top of his spiritual, but of his intellectual life. He alone lives in the full exercise of his rational powers. Religion ennobles his reason while it enlarges it.

Let, then, your soul act up to its high destination; let not that which was made to soar to heaven, grovel in the dust. Let it not live so much below itself. You wonder it is not more fixed, when it is perpetually resting on things which are not fixed themselves. In the rest of a Christian there is stability. Nothing can shake his confidence but sin. Outward attacks and troubles rather fix than unsettle him, as tempests from without only serve to root the oak faster, while an inward canker will gradually rot and decay it.

These are only a few of the mistakes among the multitude which might have been pointed out; but these are noticed as being of common and every day occurrence. The ineffectiveness of such a religion will be obvious.

That religion which sinks christianity into a mere conformity to religious usages, must always fail of substantial effects. If sin be seated in the heart, if that be its home, that is the place in which it must be combated. It is in vain to attack it in the suburbs, when it is lodged in the centre. Mere forms can never expel that enemy which they can never reach. By a religion of decencies, our corruptions may perhaps be driven out of sight, but they will never be driven out of possession. If they are expelled from their outworks, they will retreat to their citadel. If they do not appear in grosser forms, pro-

hibited by the decalogue, still they will exist. The shape may be altered, but the principle will remain. They will exist in the spiritual modification of the same sins, equally forbidden by the divine expositor. He who dares not be revengeful, will be unforgiving. He who ventures not to break the letter of the seventh commandment in act, will violate it in the spirit. He who has not courage to forfeit heaven by profligacy, will scale it by pride, or forfeit it by unprofitableness.

It is not any vain hope, built on some external privilege or performance on the one hand, nor a presumptuous confidence that our names are written in the book of life, on the other, which can afford a reasonable ground of safety, but it is endeavouring to keep all the commandments of God; it is living to him who died for us; it is being conformed to his image, as well as redeemed by his blood. This is christian virtue; this is the holiness of a believer. A lower motive will produce a lower morality, but such an unsanctified morality God will not accept.

For it will little avail us that Christ has died for us, that he has conquered sin, triumphed over the powers of darkness, and overcome the world, while any sin retains its unresisted dominion in our hearts, while the world is our idol, while our fostered corruptions cause us to prefer darkness to light. We must not persuade ourselves that we are reconciled to God while our rebellious hearts are not reconciled to goodness.

It is not casting a set of opinions into a mould, and a set of duties into a system, which constitutes the christian religion. The circumference must have a centre, the body must have a soul, the performances must have a principle. Outward observances

were wisely constituted to rouse our forgetfulness, to awaken our secular spirits, to call back our negligent hearts; but it was never intended that we should stop short in the use of them. They were designed to excite holy thoughts, to quicken us to holy deeds, but not to be used as equivalents for either. But we find it cheaper to serve God in a multitude of exterior acts, than to starve on interior corruption.

Nothing short of that uniform stable principle, that fixedness in religion which directs a man in all his actions, aims, and pursuits, to God as his ultimate end, can give consistency to his conduct or tranquillity to his soul. This state once attained, he will not waste all his thoughts and designs upon the world; he will not lavish all his affections on so poor a thing as his own advancement. He will desire to devote all to the only object worthy of them, to God. Our Saviour has taken care to provide that our ideas of glorifying him, may not run out into fanciful chimeras or subtle inventions, by simply stating—'HEREIN IS MY FATHER GLORIFIED, THAT YE BEAR MUCH FRUIT.' This, he goes on to inform us, is the true evidence of our being of the number of his people, by adding—'so shall ye be my disciples.'

CHAP. IV.

PERIODICAL RELIGION.

We deceive ourselves not a little when we fancy that what is emphatically called *the world*, is only to be found in this or that situation. The world is every where. It is a nature as well as a place; a principle as well as a 'local habitation and a name.' Though the principle and the nature flourish most in those haunts which are their congenial soil, yet we are too ready, when we withdraw from the world abroad, to bring it home, to lodge it in our own bosom. The natural heart is both its temple and its worshipper.

But the most devoted idolater of the world, with all the capacity and industry which he may have applied to the subject, has never yet been able to accomplish the grand design of uniting the interests of heaven and earth. This experiment, which has been more assiduously and more frequently tried than that of the philosopher for the grand hermetic secret, has been tried with about the same degree of success. The most laborious process of the spiritual chemist to reconcile religion with the world, has never yet been competent to make the contending principles coalesce.

But to drop metaphor.—Religion was never yet thoroughly relished by a heart full of the world. The world in return cannot be completely enjoyed where there is just religion enough to disturb its false peace. In such minds heaven and earth ruin each other's enjoyments.

There is a religion which is too sincere for hypocrisy, but too transient to be profitable; too superficial to reach the heart, too unproductive to proceed from it. It is slight, but not false. It has discernment enough to distinguish sin, but not firmness enough to oppose it; compunction sufficient to soften the heart, but not vigour sufficient to reform it. It laments when it does wrong, and performs all the functions of repentance of sin except forsaking it. It has every thing of devotion except the stability, and gives every thing to religion except the heart. This is a religion of times, events, and circumstances; it is brought into play by accidents, and dwindles away with the occasion which called it out. Festivals and fasts which occur but seldom, are much observed, and it is to be feared *because* they occur but seldom; while the great festival which comes every week, comes too often to be so respectfully treated. The piety of these people comes out much in sickness, but is apt to retreat again as recovery approaches. If they die, they are placed by their admirers in the Saints' calendar: if they recover, they go back into the world they had renounced, and again suspend their amendment as often as Death suspends his blow.

There is another class whose views are still lower, who yet cannot so far shake off religion as to be easy without retaining its brief and stated forms, and who contrive to mix up these forms with a faith of a piece with their practice. They blend their inconsistent works with a vague and unwarranted reliance on what the Saviour has done for them, and thus patch up a merit and a propitiation of their own—running the hazard of incurring the danger of pnnishment by their lives, and inventing a scheme

to avert it by their creed. Religion never interferes with their pleasures except by the compliment of a short and occasional suspension. Having got through these periodical acts of devotion, they return to the same scenes of vanity and idleness which they had quitted for the temporary duty; forgetting that it was the very end of those acts of devotion to cure the vanity and to correct the idleness. Had the periodical observance answered its true design, it would have disinclined them to the pleasure instead of giving them a dispensation for its indulgence. Had they used the devout exercise in a right spirit, and improved it to its true end, it would have set the heart and life at work on all those pursuits which it was calculated to promote. But their project has more ingenuity. By the stated minutes they give to religion, they cheaply purchase a protection for the misemployment of the rest of their time. They make these periodical devotions a kind of spiritual insurance office, which is to make up to the adventurers in pleasure, any loss or damage which they may sustain in its voyage.

It is of these shallow devotions, these presumed equivalents for a new heart and a new life, that God declares by the prophet, that he is 'weary.' Though of his own express appointment, they become 'an abomination' to him, as soon as the sign comes to be rested in for the thing signified. We Christians have 'our new moons and our sacrifices' under other names and other shapes; of which sacrifices, that is, of the spirit in which they are offered, the Almighty has said, 'I cannot away with them, they are iniquity.'

Now is this superficial devotion that 'giving up ourselves not with our lips only, but with our lives,'

to our Maker, to which we solemnly pledge ourselves, at least once a week? Is consecrating an hour or two to public worship on the Sunday morning, making the Sabbath 'a delight?' Is desecrating the rest of the day, by 'doing our own ways, finding our own pleasure, speaking our own words,' making it 'honourable?'

Sometimes in an awakening sermon, these periodical religionists hear, with awe and terror, of the hour of death and the day of judgment. Their hearts are penetrated with the solemn sounds. They confess the awful realities by the impression they make on their own feelings. The sermon ends, and with it the serious reflections it excited. While they listen to these things, especially if the preacher be alarming, they are all in all to them. They return to the world—and these things are as if they were not; as if they had never been; as if their reality lasted only while they were preached; as if their existence depended only on their being heard; as if truth were no longer truth than while it solicited their notice; as if there were as little stability in religion itself as in their attention to it. As soon as their minds are disengaged from the question, one would think that death and judgment were an invention, that heaven and hell were blotted from existence, that eternity ceased to be eternity, in the long intervals in which they cease to be the object of their consideration.

This is the natural effect of what we venture to denominate *periodical religion*. It is a transient homage kept totally distinct and separate from the rest of our lives, instead of its being made the prelude and the principle of a course of pious practice; instead of our weaving our devotions and our actions

into one uniform tissue by doing all in one spirit and to one end. When worshippers of this description pray for 'a clean heart and a right spirit;' when they beg of God to 'turn away their eyes from beholding vanity,' is it not to be feared that they pray to be made what they resolve never to become, that they would be very unwilling to become as good as they pray to be made, and would be sorry to be as penitent as they profess to desire? But alas! they are in little danger of being taken at their word; there is too much reason to fear their petitions will not be heard or answered, for prayer for the pardon of sin will obtain no pardon, while we retain the sin in hope that the prayer will be accepted without the renunciation.

The most solemn office of our Religion, the sacred memorial of the death of its Author, the blessed injunction and tender testimony of his dying love, the consolation of the humble believer, the gracious appointment for strengthening his faith, quickening his repentance, awakening his gratitude and kindling his charity, is too often resorted to on the same erroneous principle. He who ventures to live without the use of this holy institution, lives in a state of disobedience to the last appointment of his Redeemer. He who rests in it as a means for supplying the place of habitual piety, totally mistakes its design, and is fatally deceiving his own soul.

This awful solemnity is, it is to be hoped, rarely frequented even by this class of Christians without a desire of approaching it with the pious feelings above described. But if they carry them to the altar, are they equally anxious to carry them away from it; are they anxious to maintain them after it?

Does the rite so seriously approached commonly leave any vestige of seriousness behind it? Are they careful to perpetuate the feelings they were so desirous to excite? Do they strive to make them produce solid and substantial effects? Would that this inconstancy of mind were to be found only in the class of characters under consideration! Let the reader, however sincere in his desires, let the writer, however ready to lament the levity of others, seriously ask their own hearts if they can entirely acquit themselves of the inconsistency they are so forward to blame. If they do not find the charge brought against others but too applicable to themselves.

Irreverence antecedent to, or during this sacred solemnity, is far more rare than durable improvement after it. If there are, as we are willing to believe, none so profane as to violate the act, except those who impiously use it only as 'a pick-lock to a place,' there are too few who make it lastingly beneficial. Few so thoughtless as not to approach it with resolutions of amendment; few comparatively who carry those resolutions into effect. Fear operates in the previous instance. Why should not love operate in that which is subsequent?

A periodical religion is accompanied with a periodical repentance. This species of repentance is adopted with no small mental reservation. It is partial and disconnected. These fragments of contrition, these broken parcels of penitence—while a succession of worldly pursuits is not only resorted to, but is intended to be resorted to, during the whole of the intervening spaces, is not that sorrow which the Almighty has promised to accept. To render it pleasing to God and efficacious to ourselves, there

must be an agreement in the parts, an entireness in the whole web of life. There must be an integral repentance. A quarterly contrition in the four weeks preceding the sacred seasons will not wipe out the daily offences, the hourly negligences of the whole sinful year. Sins half forsaken through fear, and half retained through partially resisted temptation and partially adopted resolution, make up but an unprofitable piety.

In the bosom of these professors there is a perpetual conflict between fear and inclination. In conversation you will generally find them very warm in the cause of religion; but it is religion as opposed to infidelity, not as opposed to worldly mindedness. They defend the worship of God, but desire to be excused from his service. Their heart is the slave of the world, but their blindness hides from them the turpitude of that world. They commend piety but dread its requisitions. They allow that repentance is necessary, but then how easy is it to find reasons for deferring a necessary evil? *Who* will hastily adopt a painful measure which he can find a creditable pretence for evading? They censure whatever is ostensibly wrong, but avoiding only part of it, the part they retain robs them of the benefits of their partial renunciation.

We cannot sufficiently admire the wisdom of the church, in enjoining extraordinary acts of devotion at the return of those festivals so happily calculated to excite devotional feelings. Extraordinary repentance of sin is peculiarly suitable to the seasons that record those grand events which sin occasioned. But the church never intended that these more stated and strict self-examinations should preclude our habitual self-inspection. It never intended its holy

offices to supply the place of general holiness, but to promote it. It intended that these solemn occasions should animate the flame of piety, but it never meant to furnish a reason for neglecting to keep the flame alive till the next return should again kindle the dying embers. It meant that every such season should gladden the heart of the Christian at its approach, and not discharge him from duty at its departure. It meant to lighten his conscience of the burden of sin, not to encourage him to begin a new score, again to be wiped off at the succeeding festival. It intended to quicken the vigilance of the believer, and not to dismiss the sentinel from his post. If we are not the better for these divinely appointed helps, we are the worse. If we use them as a discharge from that diligence which they were intended to promote, we convert our blessings into snares.

This abuse of our advantages arises from our not incorporating our devotions into the general habit of our lives. Till our religion become an inward principle and not an external act, we shall not receive that benefit from her forms, however excellent, which they are calculated to convey. It is to those who possess the spirit of christianity that her forms are so valuable. To them the form excites the spirit, as the spirit animates the form. Till religion become the desire of our hearts, it will not become the business of our lives. We are far from meaning that it is to be its actual occupation; but that every portion, every habit, every act of life is to be animated by its spirit, influenced by its principle, governed by its power.

The very make of our nature, and our necessary commerce with the world, naturally fill our hearts and minds with thoughts and ideas, over which we

have unhappily too little control. We find this to be the case when in our better hours we attempt to give ourselves up to serious reflection. How many intrusions of worldly thoughts, how many impertinent imaginations, not only irrelevant, but uncalled and unwelcome, crowd in upon the mind so forcibly as scarcely to be repelled by our sincerest efforts. How impotent then to repel such images must that mind be, which is devoted to worldly pursuits, which yields itself up to them, whose opinions, habits, and conduct are under their allowed influence!

If, as we have before observed, religion consists in a new heart and a new spirit, it will become not our occasional act, but our abiding disposition, proving its settled existence in the mind by its habitually disposing our thoughts and actions, our devotions and our practice to a conformity to each other and to itself.

Let us not consider a spirit of worldliness as a little infirmity, as a natural, and therefore a pardonable weakness; as a trifling error which will be overlooked for the sake of our many good qualities. It is in fact the essence of our other faults; the temper that stands between us and our salvation; the spirit which is in direct opposition to the spirit of God. Individual sins may more easily be cured, but this is the principle of all spiritual disease. A worldly spirit where it is rooted and cherished, runs through the whole character, insinuates itself in all we say and think and do. It is this which makes us so dead in religion, so averse from spiritual things, so forgetful of God, so unmindful of eternity, so satisfied with ourselves, so impatient of serious discourse, and so alive to that vain and frivolous inter-

course which excludes intellect almost as much as piety from our general conversation.

It is not therefore our more considerable actions alone which require watching, for they seldom occur. They do not form the habit of life in ourselves, nor the chief importance of our example to others. It is to our ordinary behaviour; it is to our deportment in common life; it is to our prevailing turn of mind in general intercourse, by which we shall profit or corrupt those with whom we associate. It is our conduct in social life which will help to diffuse a spirit of piety or a distaste to it. If we have much influence, this is the place in which particularly to exert it. If we have little, we have still enough to infect the temper and lower the tone of our narrow society.

If we really believe that it is the design of christianity to raise us to a participation of the divine nature, the slightest reflection on this elevation of our character would lead us to maintain its dignity in the ordinary intercourse of life. We should not so much inquire whether we are transgressing any actual prohibition; whether any standing law is pointed against us; as whether we are supporting the dignity of the christian character; whether we are acting suitably to our profession; whether more exactness in the common occurrences of the day, more correctness in our conversation, would not be such evidences of our religion, as by being obvious and intelligible, might not almost insensibly produce important effects.

The most insignificant people must not through indolence and selfishness undervalue their own influence. Most persons have a little circle of which they are a sort of centre. Its smallness may lessen

their quantity of good, but does not diminish the duty of using that little influence wisely. Where is the human being so inconsiderable but that he may in some shape benefit others, either by calling their virtues into exercise, or by setting them an example of virtue himself? But we are humble just in the wrong place. When the exhibition of our talents or splendid qualities is in question, we are not backward in the display. When a little self-denial is to be exercised, when a little good might be effected by our example, by our discreet management in company, by giving a better turn to conversation, then at once we grow wickedly modest—'Such an insignificant creature as I am can do no good,'—'Had I a higher rank or brighter talents, then indeed my influence might be exerted to some purpose.'—Thus under the mask of diffidence, we justify our indolence; and let slip those lesser occasions of promoting religion which if we all improved, how much might the condition of society be raised.

The hackneyed interrogation, 'What—must we be always talking about religion?' must have the hackneyed answer—Far from it. Talking about religion is not being religious. But we may bring the *spirit* of religion into company, and keep it in perpetual operation when we do not professedly make it our subject. We may be constantly advancing its interests, we may without effort or affectation be giving an example of candour, of moderation, of humility, of forbearance. We may employ our influence by correcting falsehood, by checking levity, by discouraging calumny, by vindicating misrepresented merit, by countenancing every thing which has a good tendency—in short, by throwing our whole weight, be it great or small, into the right scale.

CHAP. V.

PRAYER.

PRAYER is the application of want to him who only can relieve it; the voice of sin to him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty, the prostration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of trust. It is not eloquence, but earnestness; not the definition of helplessness, but the feeling of it; not figures of speech, but compunction of soul. It is the 'Lord save us we perish' of drowning Peter; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy.

Adoration is the noblest employment of created beings; confession the natural language of guilty creatures; gratitude the spontaneous expression of pardoned sinners.

Prayer is desire. It is not a conception of the mind nor a mere effort of the intellect, nor an act of the memory; but an elevation of the soul towards its maker; a pressing sense of our own ignorance and infirmity, a consciousness of the perfections of God, of his readiness to hear, of his power to help, of his willingness to save.

It is not an emotion produced in the senses; nor an effect wrought by the imagination; but a determination of the will, an effusion of the heart.

Prayer is the guide to self-knowledge by prompting us to look after our sins in order to pray against them; a motive to vigilance, by teaching us to guard against those sins which, through self-examination, we have been enabled to detect.

Prayer is an act both of the understanding and of the heart. The understanding must apply itself to the knowledge of the divine perfections, or the heart will not be led to the adoration of them. It would not be a *reasonable* service, if the mind was excluded. It must be rational worship, or the human worshipper would not bring to the service the distinguished faculty of his nature, which is reason. It must be spiritual worship; or it would want the distinctive quality to make it acceptable to Him, who has declared that He will be worshipped 'in spirit and in truth.'

Prayer is right in itself as the most powerful means of resisting sin and advancing in holiness. It is above all right, as every thing is, which has the authority of Scripture, the command of God, and the example of Christ.

There is a perfect consistency in all the ordinations of God; a perfect congruity in the whole scheme of his dispensations. If man were not a corrupt creature, such prayer as the gospel enjoins would not have been necessary. Had not prayer been an important means for curing those corruptions, a God of perfect wisdom would not have ordered it. He would not have prohibited every thing which tends to inflame and promote them, had they not existed, nor would he have commanded every thing that has a tendency to diminish and remove them, had not their existence been fatal. Prayer, therefore, is an indispensable part of his economy and of our obedience.

It is a hackneyed objection to the use of prayer that it is offending the omniscience of God to suppose he requires information of our wants. But no objection can be more futile. We do not pray to in-

form God of our wants, but to express our sense of the wants which he already knows. As he has not so much made his promise to our necessities, as to our requests, it is reasonable that our requests should be made before we can hope that our necessities will be relieved. God does not promise to those who want that they shall 'have,' but to those who 'ask;' nor to those who need that they shall 'find,' but to those who 'seek.' So far therefore from his previous knowledge of our wants being a ground of objection to prayer, it is in fact the true ground for our application. Were he not knowledge itself, our information would be of as little use, as our application would be, were he not goodness itself.

We cannot attain to a just notion of prayer while we remain ignorant of our own nature, of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture, of our relation to him and dependence on him. If therefore we do not live in the daily study of the holy scriptures, we shall want the highest motives to this duty and the best helps for performing it; if we do, the cogency of these motives, and the inestimable value of these helps, will render argument unnecessary and exhortation superfluous.

One cause therefore of the dulness of many Christians in prayer, is, their slight acquaintance with the sacred volume. They hear it periodically, they read it occasionally, they are contented to know it historically, to consider it superficially, but they do not endeavour to get their minds imbued with its spirit. If they store their memory with its facts, they do not impress their hearts with its truths. They do not regard it as the nutriment on which their spiritual life and growth depend. They do not pray over it; they do not consider all its doctrines as of

practical application; they do not cultivate that spiritual discernment which alone can enable them judiciously to appropriate its promises and its denunciations to their own actual case. They do not apply it as an unerring line to ascertain their own rectitude or obliquity.

In our retirements, we too often fritter away our precious moments, moments rescued from the world, in trivial, sometimes it is to be feared, in corrupt thoughts. But if we must give the reins to our imagination, let us send this excursive faculty to range among great and noble objects. Let it stretch forward under the sanction of faith and the anticipation of prophecy, to the accomplishment of those glorious promises and tremendous threatenings which will soon be realized in the eternal world. These are topics which under the safe and sober guidance of scripture, will fix its largest speculations and sustain its loftiest flights. The same scripture while it expands and elevates the mind, will keep it subject to the dominion of truth; while at the same time it will teach it that its boldest excursions must fall infinitely short of the astonishing realities of a future state.

Though we cannot pray with a too deep sense of sin, we may make our sins too exclusively the object of our prayers. While we keep, with a self-abasing eye, our own corruptions in view, let us look with equal intentness on that mercy, which cleanseth from all sin. Let our prayers be all humiliation, but let them not be all complaint. When men indulge no other thought but that they are rebels, the hopelessness of pardon hardens them into disloyalty. Let them look to the mercy of the king, as well as to the rebellion of the subject. If we contemplate

his grace as displayed in the gospel, then, though our humility will increase, our despair will vanish. Gratitude in this as in human instances will create affection. 'We love him because he first loved us.'

Let us then always keep our unworthiness in view as a reason why we stand in need of the mercy of God in Christ; but never plead it as a reason why we should not draw nigh to him to implore that mercy. The best men are unworthy for their own sakes; the worst on repentance will be accepted for his sake and through his merits.

In prayer then, the perfections of God, and especially his mercies in our redemption, should occupy our thoughts as much as our sins; our obligation to him as much as our departures from him. We should keep up in our hearts a constant sense of our own weakness, not with a design to discourage the mind and depress the spirits; but with a view to drive us out of ourselves, in search of the divine assistance. We should contemplate our infirmity in order to draw us to look for his strength, and to seek that power from God which we vainly look for in ourselves. We do not tell a sick friend of his danger in order to grieve or terrify him, but to induce him to apply to his physician, and to have recourse to his remedy.

Among the charges which have been brought against serious piety, one is, that it teaches men to despair. The charge is just in one sense as to the fact, but false in the sense intended. It teaches us to despair indeed of ourselves, while it inculcates that faith in a Redeemer, which is the true antidote to despair. Faith quickens the doubting spirit, while it humbles the presumptuous. The lowly Christian takes comfort in the blessed promise, that God will

never forsake them that are his. The presumptuous man is equally right in the doctrine, but wrong in applying it. He takes that comfort to himself which was meant for another class of characters. The mal-appropriation of Scripture promises and threatenings, is the cause of much error and delusion.

Though some devout enthusiasts have fallen into error by an unnatural and impracticable disinterestedness, asserting that God is to be loved exclusively for himself, with an absolute renunciation of any view of advantage to ourselves; yet that prayer cannot be mercenary, which involves God's glory with our own happiness, and makes his will the law of our requests. Though we are to desire the glory of God supremely; though this ought to be our grand actuating principle, yet he has graciously permitted, commanded, invited us, to attach our own happiness to this primary object. The Bible exhibits not only a beautiful, but an inseparable combination of both, which delivers us from the danger of unnaturally renouncing our own benefit for the promotion of God's glory, on the one hand; and on the other, from seeking any happiness independent of him, and underived from him. In enjoining us to love him supremely, he has connected an unspeakable blessing with a paramount duty, the highest privilege with the most positive command.

What a triumph for the humble Christian to be assured, that 'the high and lofty one which inhabiteth eternity,' condescends at the same time to dwell in the heart of the contrite;—in *his* heart! To know that God is the God of his life, to *know* that he is even invited to take the Lord for his God. To close with God's offers, to accept his invitations, to receive God as his portion, must surely be more

pleasing to our heavenly Father, than separating our happiness from his glory. To disconnect our interests from his goodness, is at once to detract from his perfections, and to obscure the brightness of our own hopes. The declarations of inspired writers are confirmed by the authority of the heavenly hosts. They proclaim that the glory of God and the happiness of his creatures, so far from interfering, are connected with each other. We know but of one anthem composed and sung by angels, and this most harmoniously combines 'the glory of God in the highest with peace on earth and good will to men.'

'The beauty of Scripture,' says the great Saxon reformer, 'consists in pronouns.' This God is *our* God—God, even our *own* God, shall bless us. How delightful the appropriation! To glorify him as being in himself consummate excellence, and to love him from the feeling that this excellence is directed to our felicity! Here modesty would be ingratitude; disinterestedness rebellion. It would be severing ourselves from him, in whom we live, and move, and are; it would be dissolving the connexion which he has condescended to establish between himself and his creatures.

It has been justly observed, that the Scripture saints make this union the chief ground of their grateful exultation—'*My* strength'—'*my* rock'—'*my* fortress'—'*my* deliverer!' Again—'Let the God of *my* salvation be exalted!' Now take away the pronoun and substitute the article *the*, how comparatively cold is the impression! The consummation of the joy arises from the peculiarity, the intimacy, the endearment of the relation.

Nor to the liberal Christian is the grateful joy diminished, when he blesses his God as 'the God of all them that trust in him.' All general blessings, will he say, all providential mercies, are mine individually, are mine as completely as if no other shared in the enjoyment. Life, light, the earth and heavens, the sun and stars, whatever sustains the body, and recreates the spirits! My obligation is as great as if the mercy had been made purely for me. As great? nay, it is greater—it is augmented by a sense of the millions who participate in the blessing. The same enlargement of the personal obligation holds good, nay rises higher, in the mercies of redemption. The Lord is *my* Saviour as completely as if he had redeemed only me. That he has redeemed 'a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,' is diffusion without abatement; it is general participation without individual diminution—Each has all.

In adoring the providence of God, we are apt to be struck with what is new and out of course, while we too much overlook long, habitual and uninterrupted mercies. But common mercies, if less striking, are more valuable, both because we have them always, and for the reason above assigned, because others share them. The ordinary blessings of life are overlooked for the very reason that they ought to be most prized—because they are most uniformly bestowed. They are most essential to our support, and when once they are withdrawn we begin to find that they are also most essential to our comfort. Nothing raises the price of a blessing like its removal; whereas it was its continuance which should have taught us its value. We require novel-

ties to awaken our gratitude, not considering that it is the duration of mercies which enhances their value. We want fresh excitements. We consider mercies long enjoyed as things of course, as things to which we have a sort of presumptive claim; as if God had no right to withdraw what he had once bestowed: as if he were obliged to continue what he has once been pleased to confer.

But that the sun has shone unremittingly from the day that God created him, is not a less stupendous exertion of power than that the hand which fixed him in the heavens, and marked out his progress through them, once said by his servant, 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.' That he has gone on in his strength, driving his uninterrupted career, and 'rejoicing as a giant to run his course,' for six thousand years, is a more astonishing exhibition of Omnipotence than that he should have been once suspended by the hand which set him in motion. That the ordinances of heaven, that the established laws of nature, should have been for one day interrupted to serve a particular occasion, is a less real wonder, and certainly a less substantial blessing, than that in such a multitude of ages they should have pursued their appointed course, for the comfort of the whole system;

> For ever singing as they shine
> The hand that made us is divine.

As the affections of the Christian ought to be set on things above, so it is for them that his prayers will be chiefly addressed. God in promising to 'give those who delight in him the desire of their heart,' could never mean temporal things; for these they might desire improperly as to the object, and

inordinately as to the degree. The promise relates principally to spiritual blessings. He not only gives us these mercies, but the very desire to obtain them is also his gift. Here our prayer requires no qualifying, no conditioning, no limitation. We cannot err in our choice, for God himself is the object of it; we cannot exceed in the degree, unless it were possible to love him too well, or to please him too much.

We should pray for worldly comforts, and for a blessing on our earthly plans, though lawful in themselves, conditionally, and with a reservation; because after having been earnest in our requests for them, it may happen that when we come to the petition 'thy will be done,' we may in these very words be praying that our previous petitions may not be granted. In this brief request consists the vital principle, the essential spirit of prayer. God shows his munificence in encouraging us to ask most earnestly for the greatest things, by promising that the smaller 'shall be added unto us.' We therefore acknowledge his liberality most when we request the highest favours. He manifests his infinite superiority to earthly fathers by chiefly delighting to confer those spiritual gifts, which *they* less solicitously desire for their children than those worldly advantages on which God sets so little value.

Nothing short of a sincere devotedness to God, can enable us to maintain an equality of mind, under unequal circumstances. We murmur that we have not the things we ask amiss, not knowing that they are withheld by the same mercy by which the things that are good for us are granted. Things good in themselves may not be good for us. A re-

signed spirit is the proper disposition to prepare us for receiving mercies, or for having them denied. Resignation of soul, like the allegiance of a good subject, is always in readiness, though not in action: whereas an impatient mind is a spirit of disaffection always prepared to revolt, when the will of the sovereign is in opposition to that of the subject. This seditious principle is the infallible characteristic of an unrenewed mind.

A sincere love of God will make us thankful when our supplications are granted, and patient and cheerful when they are denied. He who feels his heart rise against any divine dispensation, ought not to rest till by serious meditation and earnest prayer it be moulded into submission. A habit of acquiescence in the will of God, will so operate on the faculties of his mind, that even his judgment will embrace the conviction, that what he once so ardently desired, would not have been that good thing, which his blindness had conspired with his wishes to make him believe it to be. He will recollect the many instances in which if his importunity had prevailed, the thing which ignorance requested, and wisdom denied, would have insured his misery. Every fresh disappointment will teach him to distrust himself, and to confide in God. Experience will instruct him that there may be a better way of hearing our requests than that of granting them. Happy for us that he to whom they are addressed knows which is best, and acts upon that knowledge.

> Still lift for good the supplicating voice,
> But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice;
> Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
> Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.

We should endeavour to render our private devotions effectual remedies for our own particular sins. Prayer against sin in general is too indefinite to reach the individual case. We must bring it home to our own heart, else we may be confessing another man's sins and overlooking our own. If we have any predominant fault, we should pray more especially against that fault. If we pray for any virtue of which we particularly stand in need, we should dwell on our own deficiencies in that virtue, till our souls become deeply affected with our want of it. Our prayers should be circumstantial, not, as was before observed, for the information of infinite wisdom, but for the stirring up of our own dull affections. And as the recapitulation of our wants tends to keep up a sense of our dependence, the enlarging on our especial mercies will tend to keep alive a sense of gratitude. While indiscriminate petitions, confessions, and thanksgivings leave the mind to wander in indefinite devotion and unaffecting generalities, without personality and without appropriation. It must be obvious that we except those grand universal points in which all have an equal interest, and which must always form the essence of public prayer.

On the blessing attending importunity in prayer, the Gospel is abundantly explicit. God perhaps delays to give that we may persevere in asking. He may require importunity for our own sakes, that the frequency and urgency of the petition may bring our hearts into that frame to which he will be favourable.

As we ought to live in a spirit of obedience to his commands, so we should live in a frame of waiting for his blessings on our prayers, and in a spirit

of gratitude when we have obtained it. This is that 'preparation of the heart' which would always keep us in a posture for duty. If we desert the duty because an immediate blessing does not visibly attend it, it shows that we do not serve God out of conscience, but selfishness: that we grudge expending on him that service which brings us in no immediate interest. Though he grant not our petition, let us never be tempted to withdraw our application.

Our reluctant devotions may remind us of the remark of a certain great political wit, who apologized for his late attendance in parliament, by his being detained while a party of soldiers were *dragging a volunteer* to his duty. How many excuses do we find for not being in time! How many apologies for brevity! How many evasions for neglect! How unwilling, too often, are we to come into the divine presence, how reluctant to remain in it! Those hours which are least valuable for business, which are least seasonable for pleasure, we commonly give to religion. Our energies which were so exerted in the society we have just quitted, are sunk as we approach the divine presence. Our hearts, which were all alacrity in some frivolous conversation, become cold and inanimate, as if it were the natural property of devotion to freeze the affections. Our animal spirits, which so readily performed their functions before, now slacken their vigour and lose their vivacity. The sluggish body sympathizes with the unwilling mind, and each promotes the deadness of the other; both are slow in listening to the call of duty; both are soon weary in performing it. As prayer requires all the energies of the compound being of man, so we too often feel as if there

were a conspiracy of body, soul and spirit, to disincline and disqualify us for it.

When the heart is once sincerely turned to religion, we need not, every time we pray, examine into every truth, and seek for conviction over and over again; but assume that those doctrines are true, the truth of which we have already proved. From a general and fixed impression of these principles, will result a taste, a disposedness, a love, so intimate, that the convictions of the understanding will become the affections of the heart.

To be deeply impressed with a few fundamental truths, to digest them thoroughly, to meditate on them seriously, to pray over them fervently, to get them deeply rooted in the heart, will be more productive of faith and holiness, than to labour after variety, ingenuity or elegance. The indulgence of imagination will rather distract than edify. Searching after ingenious thoughts will rather divert the attention from God to ourselves, than promote fixedness of thought, singleness of intention, and devotedness of spirit. Whatever is subtile and refined, is in danger of being unscriptural. If we do not guard the mind, it will learn to wander in quest of novelties. It will learn to set more value on original thoughts than devout affections. It is the business of prayer to cast down imaginations which gratify the natural activity of the mind, while they leave the heart unhumbled.

We should confine ourselves to the present business of the present moment; we should keep the mind in a state of perpetual dependence; we should entertain no long views. 'Now is the accepted time.'—'To-day we must hear his voice'—'Give us *this* day our daily bread.' The manna will not

keep till to-morrow: to-morrow will have its own wants, and must have its own petitions. To-morrow we must seek the bread of heaven afresh.

We should however avoid coming to our devotions with unfurnished minds. We should be always laying in materials for prayer, by a diligent course of serious reading, by treasuring up in our minds the most important truths. If we rush into the divine presence with a vacant, or ignorant, or unprepared mind, with a heart full of the world; as we shall feel no disposition or qualification for the work we are about to engage in, so we cannot expect that our petitions will be heard or granted. There must be some congruity between the heart and the object, some affinity between the state of our minds and the business in which they are employed, if we would expect success in the work.

We are often deceived both as to the principle and the effect of our prayers. When from some external cause the heart is glad, the spirits light, the thoughts ready, the tongue voluble, a kind of spontaneous eloquence is the result; with this we are pleased, and this ready flow we are willing to impose on ourselves for piety.

On the other hand, when the mind is dejected; the animal spirits low; the thoughts confused; when apposite words do not readily present themselves, we are apt to accuse our hearts of want of fervour, to lament our weakness, and to mourn that because we have had no pleasure in praying, our prayers have, therefore, not ascended to the throne of mercy. In both cases we perhaps judge ourselves unfairly. These unready accents, these faltering praises, these ill-expressed petitions, may find more acceptance than the florid talk with which we were

so well satisfied: the latter consisted, it may be, of shining thoughts, floating on the fancy, eloquent words dwelling only on the lips: the former was the sighing of a contrite heart, abased by the feeling of its own unworthiness, and awed by the perfections of a holy and heart-searching God. The heart is dissatisfied with its own dull and tasteless repetitions, which, with all their imperfections, infinite goodness may perhaps hear with favour.* We may not only be elated with the fluency, but even with the fervency of our prayers. Vanity may grow out of the very act of renouncing it, and we may begin to feel proud at having humbled ourselves so eloquently.

There is, however, a strain and spirit of prayer equally distinct from that facility and copiousness for which we certainly are never the better in the sight of God, and from that constraint and dryness for which we may be never the worse. There is a simple, solid, pious strain of prayer, in which the supplicant is so filled and occupied with a sense of his own dependence, and of the importance of the things for which he asks, and so persuaded of the power and grace of God through Christ to give him those things, that while he is engaged in it, he does not merely imagine, but feels assured that God is

* Of this sort of repetitions, our admirable church liturgy has been accused as a fault; but this defect, if it be one, happily accommodates itself to our infirmities. Where is the favoured being whose attention never wanders, whose heart accompanies his lips in every sentence? Is there no absence of mind in the petitioner, no wandering of the thoughts, no inconstancy of the heart? which these repetitions are wisely calculated to correct, to rouse the dead attention, to bring back the strayed affections.

nigh to him as a reconciled Father, so that every burden and doubt are taken off from his mind. 'He knows,' as St. John expresses it, 'that he has the petitions he desired of God,' and feels the truth of that promise, 'while they are yet speaking I will hear.' This is the perfection of prayer.

CHAP. VI.

Cultivation of a Devotional Spirit.

To maintain a devotional spirit, two things are especially necessary—habitually to cultivate the disposition, and habitually to avoid whatever is unfavourable to it. Frequent retirement and recollection are indispensable, together with such a general course of reading, as if it do not actually promote the spirit we are endeavouring to maintain, shall never be hostile to it. We should avoid as much as in us lies all such society, all such amusements, as excite tempers which it is the daily business of a Christian to subdue, and all those feelings which it is his constant duty to suppress.

And here may we venture to observe, that if some things which are apparently innocent, and do not assume an alarming aspect, or bear a dangerous character; things which the generality of decorous people affirm, (how truly we know not) to be safe for them; yet if we find that these things stir up in us improper propensities; if they awaken thoughts which ought not to be excited; if they abate our love for religious exercises, or infringe

on our time for performing them; if they make spiritual concerns appear insipid; if they wind our heart a little more about the world; in short, if we have formerly found them injurious to our own souls, then let no example or persuasion, no belief of their alleged innocence, no plea of their perfect safety, tempt us to indulge in them. It matters little to *our* security what they are to others. Our business is with ourselves. Our responsibility is on our own heads. Others cannot know the side on which we are assailable. Let our own unbiassed judgment determine our opinion; let our own experience decide for our own conduct.

In speaking of books, we cannot forbear noticing that very prevalent sort of reading, which is little less productive of evil, little less prejudicial to moral and mental improvement, than that which carries a more formidable appearance. We cannot confine our censure to those more corrupt writings which deprave the heart, debauch the imagination, and poison the principles. Of these the turpitude is so obvious, that no caution on this head, it is presumed, *can* be necessary. But if justice forbids us to confound the insipid with the mischievous, the idle with the vicious, and the frivolous with the profligate, still we can only admit of shades, deep shades we allow, of difference. These works, if comparatively harmless, yet debase the taste, slacken the intellectual nerve, let down the understanding, set the fancy loose, and send it gadding among low and mean objects. They not only run away with the time which should be given to better things, but gradually destroy all taste for better things. They sink the mind to their own standard, and give it a sluggish reluctance, we had almost said, a mo-

ral incapacity for every thing above their level. The mind, by long habit of stooping, loses its erectness, and yields to its degradation. It becomes so low and narrow by the littleness of the things which engage it, that it requires a painful effort to lift itself high enough, or to open itself wide enough to embrace great and noble objects. The appetite is vitiated. Excess, instead of producing a surfeit, by weakening the digestion, only induces a loathing for stronger nourishment. The faculties which might have been expanding in works of science, or soaring in the contemplation of genius, become satisfied with the impertinences of the most ordinary fiction, lose their relish for the severity of truth, the elegance of taste, and the soberness of religion. Lulled in the torpor of repose, the intellect doses, and enjoys in its walking dream,

All the wild trash of sleep, without the rest.

In avoiding books which excite the passions, it would seem strange to include even some devotional works. Yet such as merely kindle warm feelings, are not always the safest. Let us rather prefer those, which, while they tend to raise a devotional spirit, awaken the affections without disordering them; which while they elevate the desires, purify them, which show us our own nature, and lay open its corruptions. Such as show us the malignity of sin, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the feebleness of our best resolutions; such as teach us to pull off the mask from the fairest appearances, and discover every hiding place, where some lurking evil would conceal itself; such as show us not what we appear to others, but what we really are; such as cooperating with our interior feelings, and showing us our natural state,

point out our absolute need of a Redeemer, lead us to seek to him for pardon from a conviction that there is no other refuge, no other salvation. Let us be conversant with such writings as teach us that while we long to obtain the remission of our transgressions, we must not desire the remission of our duties. Let us seek for such a Saviour as will not only deliver us from the punishment of sin, but from its dominion also.

And let us ever bear in mind that the end of prayer is not answered when the prayer is finished. We should regard prayer as a means to a farther end. The *act* of prayer is not sufficient, we must cultivate a *spirit* of prayer. And though when the actual devotion is over, we cannot, amid the distractions of company and business, always be thinking of heavenly things: yet the desire, the frame, the propensity, the willingness to return to them we must, however difficult, endeavour to maintain.

The proper temper for prayer should precede the act. The disposition should be wrought in the mind before the exercise is begun. To bring a proud temper to an humble prayer, a luxurious habit to a self-denying prayer, or a worldly disposition to a spiritually-minded prayer, is a positive anomaly. A habit is more powerful than an act, and a previously indulged temper during the day will not, it is to be feared, be fully counteracted by the exercise of a few minutes devotion at night.

Prayer is designed for a perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue; if therefore the cause is not followed by its consequence, a consequence inevitable but for the impediments we bring to it, we rob our nature of its highest privilege, and run the dan-

ger of incurring a penalty where we are looking for a blessing.

That the habitual tendency of the life should be the preparation for the stated prayer, is naturally suggested to us by our blessed Redeemer in his sermon on the Mount. He announced the precepts of holiness, and their corresponding beatitudes; he gave the spiritual exposition of the law, the directions for alms-giving, the exhortation to love our enemies, nay the essence and spirit of the whole Decalogue, previous to his delivering his own divine prayer as a pattern for ours. Let us learn from this that the preparation of prayer is therefore to live in all those pursuits which we may safely beg of God to bless, and in a conflict with all those temptations into which we pray not to be led.

If God be the centre to which our hearts are tending, every line in our lives must meet in him. With this point in view there will be a harmony between our prayers and our practice, a consistency between devotion and conduct, which will make every part turn to this one end, bear upon this one point. For the beauty of the christian scheme consists not in parts (however good in themselves) which tend to separate views, and lead to different ends; but it arises from its being one entire, uniform, connected plan, 'compacted of that which every joint supplieth,' and of which all the parts terminate in this one grand ultimate point.

The design of prayer therefore as we before observed, is not merely to make us devout while we are engaged in it, but that its odour may be diffused through all the intermediate spaces of the day, enter into all its occupations, duties and tempers. Nor must its results be partial, or limited to easy and

pleasant duties, but extend to such as are less alluring. When we pray, for instance, for our enemies, the prayer must be rendered practical, must be made a means of softening our spirit, and cooling our resentment toward them. If we deserve their enmity, the true spirit of prayer will put us upon endeavouring to cure the fault which has excited it. If we do not deserve it, it will put us on striving for a placable temper, and we shall endeavour not to let slip so favourable an occasion of cultivating it. There is no such softener of animosity, no such soother of resentment, no such allayer of hatred, as sincere, cordial prayer.

It is obvious, that the precept to pray without ceasing can never mean to enjoin a continual course of actual prayer. But while it more directly enjoins us to embrace all proper occasions of performing this sacred duty, or rather of claiming this valuable privilege, so it plainly implies that we should try to keep up constantly that sense of the divine presence which shall maintain the disposition. In order to this, we should inure our minds to reflection; we should encourage serious thoughts. A good thought barely passing through the mind will make little impression on it. We must arrest it, constrain it to remain with us, expand, amplify, and as it were, take it to pieces. It must be distinctly unfolded, and carefully examined, or it will leave no precise idea; it must be fixed and incorporated, or it will produce no practical effect. We must not dismiss it till it has left some trace on the mind, till it has made some impression on the heart.

On the other hand, if we give the reins to a loose ungoverned fancy, at other times; if we abandon our minds to frivolous thoughts; if we fill them with cor-

rupt images; if we cherish sensual ideas during the rest of the day, can we expect that none of these images will intrude, that none of these impressions will be revived, but that 'the temple into which foul things' have been invited, will be cleansed at a given moment; that worldly thoughts will recede and give place at once to pure and holy thoughts? Will that Spirit grieved by impurity, or resisted by levity, return with his warm beams and cheering influences, to the contaminated mansion from which he has been driven out? Is it wonderful if finding no entrance into a heart filled with vanity he should withdraw himself? We cannot, in retiring into our closets, change our natures as we do our clothes. The disposition we carry thither will be likely to remain with us. We have no right to expect that a new temper will meet us at the door. We can only hope that the spirit we bring thither will be cherished and improved. It is not easy, rather it is not possible, to graft genuine devotion on a life of an opposite tendency; nor can we delight ourselves regularly for a few stated moments, in that God whom we have not been serving during the day. We may indeed to quiet our conscience, take up the employment of prayer, but cannot take up the state of mind which will make the employment beneficial to ourselves, or the prayer acceptable to God, if all the previous day we have been careless of ourselves, and unmindful of our Maker. *They* will not pray differently from the rest of the world, who do not live differently.

What a contradiction is it to lament the weakness, the misery, and the corruption of our nature, in our devotions, and then to rush into a life, though not perhaps of vice, yet of indulgences, calculated to increase that weakness, to inflame those corruptions,

and to lead to that misery! There is either no meaning in our prayers, or no sense in our conduct. In the one we mock God, in the other we deceive ourselves.

Will not he who keeps up an habitual intercourse with his Maker, who is vigilant in thought, self-denying in action, who strives to keep his heart from wrong desires, his mind from vain imaginations, and his lips from idle words, bring a more prepared spirit, a more collected mind, be more engaged, more penetrated, more present to the occasion? Will he not feel more delight in this devout exercise, reap more benefit from it, than he who lives at random, prays from custom, and who, though he dares not intermit the form, is a stranger to its spirit? 'O God my heart is ready,' cannot be lawfully uttered by him who is no more prepared.

We speak not here to the self-sufficient formalist, or the careless profligate. Among those whom we now take the liberty to address, are to be found, especially in the higher class of females, the amiable and the interesting, and in many respects the virtuous and correct: Characters so engaging, so evidently made for better things, so capable of reaching high degrees of excellence, so formed to give the tone to christian practice, as well as to fashion; so calculated to give a beautiful impression of that religion which they profess without sufficiently adorning; which they believe without fairly exemplifying; that we cannot forbear taking a tender interest in their welfare; we cannot forbear breathing a fervent prayer that they may yet reach the elevation for which they were intended; that they may hold out a uniform and consistent pattern, of 'whatsoever things are pure, honest, just, lovely, and of good report!' This the

Apostle goes on to intimate can only be done by THINKING ON THESE THINGS. Things can only influence our practice as they engage our attention. Would not then a confirmed habit of serious thought tend to correct that inconsideration, which we are willing to hope, more than want of principle, lies at the bottom of the inconsistency we are lamenting.

If, as it is generally allowed, the great difficulty of our spiritual life is to make the future predominate over the present, do we not by the conduct we are regretting, aggravate what it is in our power to diminish? Miscalculation of the relative value of things is one of the greatest errors of our moral life. We estimate them in an inverse proportion to their value, as well as to their duration: we lavish earnest and durable thoughts on things so trifling, that they deserve little regard, so brief, that they 'perish with the using,' while we bestow only slight attention on things of infinite worth, only transient thoughts on things of eternal duration.

Those who are so far conscientious as not to intermit a regular course of devotion, and who yet allow themselves at the same time to go on in a course of amusements, which excite a directly opposite spirit, are inconceivably augmenting their own difficulties. They are eagerly heaping up fuel in the day, on the fire which they intend to extinguish in the evening; they are voluntarily adding to the temptations, against which they mean to request grace to struggle. To acknowledge at the same time, that we find it hard to serve God as we ought, and yet to be systematically indulging habits, which must naturally increase the difficulty, makes our characters almost ridiculous, while it renders our duty almost impracticable.

While we make our way more difficult by those very indulgences with which we think to cheer and refresh it, the determined Christian becomes his own pioneer; he makes his path easy by voluntarily clearing it of the obstacles which impede his progress.

These habitual indulgences seem a contradiction to that obvious law, that one virtue always involves another; for we cannot labour after any grace, that of prayer for instance, without resisting whatever is opposite to it. If then we lament, that it is so hard to serve God, let us not by our conduct furnish arguments against ourselves; for, as if the difficulty were not great enough in itself, we are continually heaping up mountains in our way, by indulging in such pursuits and passions, as make a small labour an insurmountable one.

But we may often judge better of our state by the result, than by the act of prayer. Our very defects, our coldness, deadness, wanderings, may leave more contrition on the soul than the happiest turn of thought. The feeling of our wants, the confession of our sins, the acknowledgment of our dependence, the renunciation of ourselves, the supplication for mercy, the application to 'the fountain opened for sin,' the cordial entreaty for the aid of the Spirit, the relinquishment of our own will, resolutions of better obedience, petitions that these resolutions may be directed and sanctified; these are the subjects in which the supplicant should be engaged, by which his thoughts should be absorbed. Can they be so absorbed, if many of the intervening hours are passed in pursuits of a totally different complexion; pursuits which raise the passions which we are seeking to allay? Will the cherished vanities go at our bidding? Will the required dispositions come at our

calling? Do we find our tempers so obedient, our passions so obsequious in the other concerns of life? If not, what reason have we to expect their obsequiousness in this grand concern. We should therefore endeavour to believe as we pray, to think as we pray, to feel as we pray, and to act as we pray. Prayer must not be a solitary, independent exercise; but an exercise interwoven with many, and inseparably connected with that golden chain of christian duties, of which, when so connected, it forms one of the most important links.

Business however must have its period as well as devotion. We were sent into this world to act as well as to pray; active duties must be performed as devout exercises. Even relaxation must have its interval, only let us be careful that the indulgence of the one do not destroy the effect of the other; that our pleasures do not encroach on the time or deaden the spirit of our devotions: let us be careful that our cares, occupations, and amusements may be always such that we may not be afraid to implore the divine blessing on them; this is the criterion of their safety and of our duty. Let us endeavour that in each, in all, one continually growing sentiment and feeling, of loving, serving, and pleasing God, maintain its predominant station in the heart.

An additional reason why we should live in the perpetual use of prayer, seems to be, that our blessed Redeemer after having given both the example and the command, while on earth, condescends still to be our unceasing intercessor in heaven. Can we ever cease petitioning for ourselves, when we believe that he never ceases interceding for us?

If we are so unhappy as now to find little pleasure in this holy exercise, that however is so far from being a reason for discontinuing it, that it affords the strongest argument for perseverance. That which was at first a form, will become a pleasure; that which was a burden will become a privilege; that which we impose upon ourselves as a medicine, will become necessary as an aliment, and desirable as a gratification. That which is now short and superficial, will become copious and solid. The chariot wheel is warmed by its own motion. Use will make that easy which was at first painful. That which is once become easy will soon be rendered pleasant; instead of repining at the performance, we shall be unhappy at the omission. When a man recovering from sickness attempts to walk, he does not discontinue the exercise because he feels himself weak, nor even because the effort is painful. He rather redoubles his exertion. It is from his perseverance that he looks for strength. An additional turn every day diminishes his repugnance, augments his vigour, improves his spirits. That effort which was submitted to because it was salutary, is continued because the feeling of renovated strength renders it delightful.

CHAP. VII.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

Our love to God arises out of want. God's love to us out of fulness. Our indigence draws us to that power which can relieve, and to that goodness

which can bless us. His overflowing love delights to make us partakers of the bounties he graciously imparts, not only in the gifts of his providence, but in the richer communications of his grace. We can only be said to love God when we endeavour to glorify him, when we desire a participation of his nature, when we study to imitate his perfections.

We are sometimes inclined to suspect the love of God to us. We are too little suspicious of our want of love to him. Yet if we examine the case by evidence, as we should examine any common question, what real instances can we produce of our love to him? What imaginable instance can we not produce of his love to us? If neglect, forgetfulness, ingratitude, disobedience, coldness in our affections, deadness in our duty, be evidences of our love to him, such evidences, but such only, we can abundantly allege. If life and all the countless catalogue of mercies that makes life pleasant, be proofs of his love to us, these he has given us in hand;—if life eternal, if blessedness that knows no measure and no end, be proofs of love, these he has given us in promise—to the Christian we had almost said, he has given them in possession.

It must be an irksome thing to serve a master whom we do not love; a master whom we are compelled to obey, though we think his requisitions hard, and his commands unreasonable; under whose eye we know that we continually live, though his presence is not only undelightful but formidable.

Now every Christian must obey God whether he love him or not; he must act always in his sight, whether he delight in him or not; and to a heart of any feeling, to a spirit of any liberality, nothing is so grating as constrained obedience. To love God, to

serve him because we love him, is therefore no less our highest happiness, than our most bounden duty. Love makes all labour light. We serve with alacrity, where we love with cordiality.

Where the heart is devoted to an object, we require not to be perpetually reminded of our obligations to obey him; they present themselves spontaneously, we fulfil them readily, I had almost said, involuntarily; we think not so much of the service as of the object. The principle which suggests the work inspires the pleasure; to neglect it would be an injury to our feelings. The performance is the gratification. The omission is not more a pain to the conscience, than a wound to the affections. The implantation of this vital root perpetuates virtuous practice, and secures internal peace.

Though we cannot be always thinking of God, we may be always employed in his service. There must be intervals of our communion with him, but there must be no intermission of our attachment to him. The tender father who labours for his children, does not always employ his thoughts about them; he cannot be always conversing with them, or concerning them, yet he is always engaged in promoting their interests. His affection for them is an inwoven principle, of which he gives the most unequivocal evidence, by the assiduousness of his application in their service.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' is the primary law of our religion. Yet how apt are we to complain that we *cannot* love God, that we cannot maintain a devout intercourse with him. But would God, who is all justice, have commanded that of which he knew we were incapable? Would he who is all mercy have made our eternal

happiness to depend on something which he knew was out of our power to perform, capriciously disqualifying us for the duty he had prescribed? Would he have given the exhortation, and withheld the capacity? This would be to charge omniscience with folly, and infinite goodness with injustice;—no, when he made duty and happiness inseparable, he neither made our duty impracticable, nor our happiness unattainable. But we are continually flying to false refuges, clinging to false holds, resting on false supports: as they are uncertain they disappoint us, as they are weak they fail us; but as they are numerous, when one fails another presents itself. Till they slip from under us, we never suspect how much we rested upon them. Life glides away in a perpetual succession of these false dependencies and successive privations.

There is, as we have elsewhere observed, a striking analogy between the natural and spiritual life; the weakness and helplessness of the Christian resemble those of the infant; neither of them becomes strong, vigorous, and full grown at once, but through a long and often painful course. This keeps up a sense of dependence, and accustoms us to lean on the hand which fosters us. There is in both conditions, an imperceptible chain of depending events, by which we are carried on insensibly to the vigour of maturity. The operation which is not always obvious, is always progressive. By attempting to walk alone we discover our weakness, the experience of that weakness humbles us, and every fall drives us back to the sustaining hand, whose assistance we vainly flattered ourselves we no longer needed.

In some halcyon moments we are willing to persuade ourselves that religion has made an entire conquest over our heart; that we have renounced

the dominion of the world, have conquered our attachment to earthly things. We flatter ourselves that nothing can now again obstruct our entire submission. But we know not what spirit we are of. We say this in the calm of repose and in the stillness of the passions; when our path is smooth, our prospect smiling, danger distant, temptation absent, when we have many comforts and no trials. Suddenly, some loss, some disappointment, some privation tears off the mask, reveals us to ourselves. We at once discover that though the smaller fibres and lesser roots which fasten us down to earth may have been loosened by preceding storms, yet our substantial hold on earth is not shaken, the tap-root is not cut, we are yet fast rooted to the soil, and still stronger tempests must be sent to make us let go our hold.

It might be useful to cultivate the habit of stating our own case as strongly to ourselves as if it were the case of another; to express in so many words, thoughts which are not apt to assume any specific or palpable form; thoughts which we avoid shaping into language, but slur over, generalize, soften, and do away. How indignant, for instance, should we feel, though we ourselves make the complaint, to be told by others, that we do not love our Maker and Preserver. But let us put the question fairly to ourselves. Do we really love him? Do we love him with a supreme, nay even with an equal affection? Is there no friend, no child, no reputation, no pleasure, no society, no possession which we do not prefer to him? It is easy to affirm in a general way that there is not. But let us particularize, individualize the question—bring it home to our own hearts in some actual instance, in some tangible

shape. Let us commune with our own consciences, with our own feelings, with our own experience; let us question pointedly and answer honestly. Let us not be more ashamed to detect the fault, than to have been guilty of it.

This then will commonly be the result. Let the friend, child, reputation, possession, pleasure be endangered, but especially let it be taken away by some stroke of Providence. The scales fall from our eyes; we see, we feel, we acknowledge, with brokenness of heart, not only for our loss but for our sin, that though we did love God, yet we loved him not superlatively, and that we loved the blessing, threatened or resumed, still more. But this is one of the cases in which the goodness of God bringeth us to repentance. By the operation of his grace the resumption of the gift brings back the heart to the giver. The Almighty by his spirit takes possession of the temple from which the idol is driven out. God is reinstated in his rights, and becomes the supreme and undisputed Lord of our reverential affection.

There are three requisites to our proper enjoyment of every earthly blessing which God bestows on us;— a thankful reflection on the goodness of the giver, a deep sense of the unworthiness of the receiver, and a sober recollection of the precarious tenure by which we hold it. The first would make us grateful, the second humble, the last moderate.

But how seldom do we receive his favours in this spirit! As if religious gratitude were to be confined to the appointed days of public thanksgiving, how rarely in common society do we hear any recognition of Omnipotence even on those striking and heart-rejoicing occasions, when, ‘ with his own

right hand, and with his glorious arm he has gotten himself the victory!' Let us never detract from the merit of our valiant leaders, but rather honour them the more for this manifestation of divine power in their favour; but let us never lose sight of him 'who teacheth their hands to war, and their fingers to fight.' Let us never forget that 'He is the Rock, that his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment.'

How many seem to show not only their want of affiance in God, but that 'he is not in all their thoughts,' by their appearing to leave him entirely out of their concerns, by projecting their affairs without any reference to him, by setting out on the stock of their own unassisted wisdom, contriving and acting independently of God; expecting prosperity in the event, without seeking his direction in the outset, and taking to themselves the whole honour of the success without any recognition of his hand! do they not thus virtually imitate what Sophocles makes his blustering Atheist* boast: 'Let other men expect to conquer with the assistance of the gods, I intend to gain honour without them.'

The Christian will rather rejoice to ascribe the glory of his prosperity to the same hand to which our own manly queen gladly ascribed her signal victory. When after the defeat of the Armada, impiously termed invincible, her enemies, in order to lower the value of her agency, alleged that the victory was not owing to her, but to God who had raised the storm, she heroically declared that the visible interference of God in her favour, was that part of the success from which she derived the truest honour.

* Ajax.

Incidents and occasions every day arise, which not only call on us to trust in God, but which furnish us with suitable occasions of vindicating, if I may presume to use the expression, the character and conduct of the Almighty in the government of human affairs; yet there is no duty which we perform with less alacrity. Strange, that we should treat the Lord of heaven and earth with less confidence than we exercise towards each other! That we should vindicate the honour of a common acquaintance with more zeal than that of our insulted Maker and Preserver!

If we hear a friend accused of any act of injustice, though we cannot bring any positive proof why he should be acquitted of this specific charge, yet we resent the injury offered to his character; we clear him of the individual allegation on the ground of his general conduct, inferring that from the numerous instances we can produce of his rectitude on other occasions, he cannot be guilty of the alleged injustice. We reason from analogy, and in general we reason fairly. But when we presume to judge of the Most High, instead of vindicating his rectitude on the same grounds, under a providence seemingly severe; instead of reverting, as in the case of our friend, to the thousand instances we have formerly tasted of his kindness; instead of giving God the same credit we give to his erring creature, and inferring from his past goodness, that the present inexplicable dispensation must be consistent, though we cannot explain how, with his general character, we mutinously accuse him of inconsistency, nay of injustice. We admit virtually the most monstrous anomaly in the character of the perfect God.

But what a clue has Revelation furnished to the intricate labyrinth which seems to involve the conduct which we impiously question! It unrols the volume of divine Providence, lays open the mysterious map of infinite wisdom, throws a bright light on the darkest dispensations, vindicates the inequality of appearances, and points to that blessed region, where to all who have truly loved and served God, every apparent wrong shall be approved to have been unimpeachably right, every affliction a mercy, and the severest trials the choicest blessings.

So blind has sin made us, that the glory of God is concealed from us, by the very means which, could we discern aright, would display it, That train of second causes, which he has so marvellously disposed, obstructs our view of himself. We are so filled with wonder at the immediate effect, that our short sight penetrates not to the first cause. To see him as he is, is reserved to be the happiness of a better world. We shall then indeed 'admire him in his saints, and in all them that believe;' we shall see how necessary it was for those whose bliss is now so perfect, to have been poor, and despised, and oppressed. We shall see why the 'ungodly were in such prosperity.' Let us give God credit here for what we shall then fully know; let us adore now, what we shall understand hereafter.

They who take up religion on a false ground will never adhere to it. If they adopt it merely for the peace and pleasantness it brings, they will desert it as soon as they find their adherence to it will bring them into difficulty, distress, or discredit. It seldom answers therefore to attempt making proselytes by hanging out false colours. The Christian 'en-

dures as seeing him who is invisible.' He who adopts religion, for the sake of immediate enjoyment, will not do a virtuous action that is disagreeable to himself; nor resist a temptation that is alluring, present pleasure being his motive. There is no sure basis for virtue but the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the bright reversion for which that love is pledged. Without this, as soon as the paths of piety become rough and thorny, we shall stray into pleasanter pastures.

Religion however has her own peculiar advantages. In the transaction of all worldly affairs, there are many and great difficulties. There may be several ways out of which to choose. Men of the first understanding are not always certain which of these ways is the best. Persons of the deepest penetration are full of doubt and perplexity; their minds are undecided how to act, lest while they pursue one road, they may be neglecting another, which might better have conducted them to their proposed end.

In religion the case is different, and, in this respect, easy. As a Christian can have but one object in view, he is also certain there is but one way of attaining it. Where there is but one end, it prevents all possibility of choosing wrong;—where there is but one road, it takes away all perplexity as to the course of pursuit. That we so often wander wide of the mark, is not from any want of plainness in the path, but from the perverseness of our will in not choosing it, from the indolence of our minds in not following it up.

In our attachments to earthly things, even the most innocent, there is always a danger of excess; but from this danger we are here perfectly exempt,

for there is no possibility of excess in our love to that Being who has demanded *the whole heart.* This peremptory requisition cuts off all debate. Had God required only a portion, even were it a large portion, we might be puzzled in settling the quantum. We might be plotting how large a part we might venture to keep back without absolutely forfeiting our safety; we might be haggling for deductions, bargaining for abatements, and be perpetually compromising with our Maker. But the injunction is entire, the command is definitive, the portion is unequivocal. Though it is so compressed in the expression, yet it is so expansive and ample, in the measure: it is so distinct a claim, so imperative a requisition of *all* the faculties of the mind and strength; *all* the affections of the heart and soul; that there is not the least opening left for litigation; no place for any thing but absolute unreserved compliance.

Every thing which relates to God is infinite. We must therefore while we keep our hearts humble, keep our aims high. Our highest services indeed are but finite, imperfect. But as God is unlimited in goodness, he should have our unlimited love. The best we can offer is poor, but let us not withhold that best. He deserves incomparably more than we have to give. Let us not give him less than all. If he has ennobled our corrupt nature with spiritual affections, let us not refuse their noblest aspirations, to their noblest object. Let him not behold us so prodigally lavishing our affections on the meanest of his bounties, as to have nothing left for himself. As the standard of every thing in religion is high, let us endeavour to act in it with the highest intention of mind, with the largest use

of our faculties. Let us obey him with the most intense love, adore him with the most fervent gratitude. Let us 'praise him according to his excellent greatness.' Let us serve him with all the strength of our capacity, with all the devotion of our will.

Grace being a new principle added to our natural powers, as it determines the desires to a higher object, so it adds vigour to their activity. We shall best prove its dominion over us by desiring to exert ourselves in the cause of heaven with the same energy with which we once exerted ourselves in the cause of the world. The world was too little to fill our whole capacity. Scaliger lamented how much was lost because so fine a poet as Claudian, in his choice of a subject, wanted matter worthy of his talents; but it is the felicity of the Christian to have chosen a theme to which all the powers of his heart and of his understanding will be found inadequate. It is the glory of religion to supply an object worthy of the entire consecration of every power, faculty and affection of an immaterial, immortal being.

CHAP. VIII.

THE HAND OF GOD TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN THE DAILY CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.

If we would indeed love God, let us 'acquaint ourselves with him.' The word of inspiration has assured us that there is no other way to 'be at peace.' As we cannot love an unknown God, so neither can we know him, or even approach toward

that knowledge, but on the terms which he himself holds out to us; neither will he save us but in the method which he has himself prescribed. His very perfections, the just objects of our adoration, all stand in the way of creatures so guilty. His justice is the flaming sword which excludes us from the Paradise we have forfeited. His purity is so opposed to our corruptions, his omnipotence to our infirmity, his wisdom to our folly, that had we not to plead the great propitiation, those very attributes which are now our trust, would be our terror. The most opposite images of human conception, the widest extremes of human language, are used for the purpose of showing what God is to us in our natural state, and what he is under the christian dispensation. The 'consuming fire' is transformed into essential love.

But as we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection, so we cannot love him with that pure flame, which animates glorified spirits. But there is a preliminary acquaintance with him, an initial love of him, for which he has furnished us with means by his works, by his word, and by his spirit. Even in this weak and barren soil some germs will shoot, some blossoms will open, of that celestial plant, which, watered by the dews of heaven, and ripened by the Son of righteousness, will, in a more genial clime, expand into the fulness of perfection, and bear immortal fruits in the Paradise of God.

A person of a cold phlegmatic temper, who laments that he wants that fervour in his love of the Supreme Being, which is apparent in more ardent characters, may take comfort, if he find the same indifference respecting his worldly attachments. But if his affections are intense towards the perishable

things of earth, while they are dead to such as are spiritual, it does not prove that he is destitute of passions, but only that they are not directed to the proper object. If, however, he love God with that measure of feeling with which God has endowed him, he will not be punished or rewarded, because the stock is greater or smaller than that of some other of his fellow creatures.

In those intervals when our sense of divine things is weak and low, we must not give way to distrust, but warm our hearts with the recollection of our best moments. Our motives to love and gratitude are not now diminished, but our spiritual frame is lower, our natural spirits are weaker. Where there is languor there will be discouragements. But we must not desist. 'Faint yet pursuing,' must be the Christian's motto.

There is more merit (if ever we dare apply so arrogant a word to our worthless efforts) in persevering under depression and discomfort, than in the happiest flow of devotion, when the tide of health and spirits runs high. Where there is less gratification there is more disinterestedness. We ought to consider it as a cheering evidence, that our love may be equally pure though it is not equally fervent, when we persist in serving our heavenly father with the same constancy, though it may please him to withdraw from us the same consolations. Perseverance may bring us to the very dispositions the absence of which we are lamenting—'O tarry thou the Lord's leisure, be strong and he shall comfort thy heart.'

We are too ready to imagine that we are religious, because we know something of religion. We appropriate to ourselves the pious sentiments we

read, and we talk as if the thoughts of other men's heads were really the feelings of our own hearts. But piety has not its seat in the memory, but in the affections, for which however the memory is an excellent purveyor, though a bad substitute. Instead of an undue elation of heart when we peruse some of the psalmist's beautiful effusions, we should feel a deep self-abasement at the reflection, that however our case may sometimes resemble his, yet how inapplicable to our hearts are the ardent expressions of his repentance, the overflowing of his gratitude, the depth of his submission, the entireness of his self-dedication, the fervour of his love. But he who indeed can once say with him, 'Thou art my portion,' will, like him, surrender himself unreservedly to his service.

It is important that we never suffer our faith, any more than our love, to be depressed or elevated, by mistaking for its own operations, the ramblings of a busy imagination. The steady principle of faith must not look for its character to the vagaries of a mutable and fantastic fancy—*La folle de la Maison*, as she has been well denominated. Faith which has once fixed her foot on the immutable Rock of Ages, fastened her firm eye on the Cross, and stretched out her triumphant hand to seize the promised crown, will not suffer her stability to depend on this ever-shifting faculty; she will not be driven to despair by the blackest shades of its pencil, nor be betrayed into a careless security, by its most flattering and vivid colours.

One cause of the fluctuations of our faith is, that we are too ready to judge the Almighty by our own low standard. We judge him not by his own declarations of what he is, and what he will do, but

by our own feelings and practices. We ourselves are too little disposed to forgive those who have offended us. We therefore conclude that God cannot pardon our offences. We suspect him to be implacable, because we are apt to be so, and we are unwilling to believe that he can pass by injuries, because we find it so hard to do it. When we do forgive, it is grudgingly and superficially; we therefore infer that God cannot forgive freely and fully. We make a hypocritical distinction between forgiving and forgetting injuries. God clears away the score when he grants the pardon. He does not only say, 'thy sins and thy iniquities will I forgive,' but 'I will remember no more.'

We are disposed to urge the smallness of our offences, as a plea for their forgiveness; whereas God to exhibit the boundlessness of his own mercy, has taught us to allege a plea directly contrary—'Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is *great*.' To natural reason this argument of David is most extraordinary. But while he felt that the greatness of his own iniquity left him no resource, but in the mercy of God, he felt that God's mercy was greater even than his own sin. What a large, what a magnificent idea does it give us of the divine power and goodness, that the believer, instead of pleading the smallness of his own offences as a motive for pardon, pleads only the abundance of the divine compassion!

We are told that it is the duty of the Christian to 'seek God.' We assent to the truth of the proposition. Yet it would be less irksome to corrupt nature, in pursuit of this knowledge, to go a pilgrimage to distant lands, than to seek him within our own hearts. Our own heart is the true *terra incognita;* a land more foreign and unknown to us, than the regions

of the polar circle. Yet that heart is the place, in which an acquaintance with God must be sought. It is there we must worship him, if we would worship him in spirit and in truth.

But, alas! the heart is not the home of a worldly man, it is scarcely the home of a Christian. If business and pleasure are the natural element of the generality—a dreary vacuity, sloth and insensibility, too often worse than both, disincline, disqualify too many Christians for the pursuit.

I have observed, and I think I have heard others observe, that a common beggar had rather screen himself under the wall of a church-yard, if overtaken by a shower of rain, though the church doors stand invitingly open, than take shelter within it, while divine service is performing. It is a less annoyance to him to be drenched with the storm, than to enjoy the convenience of a shelter and a seat, if he must enjoy them at the heavy price of listening to the sermon.

While we condemn the beggar, let us look into our own hearts; happy if we cannot there detect somewhat of the same indolence, indisposedness, and distaste to serious things! Happy, if we do not find, that we prefer not only our pleasures and enjoyments, but, I had almost said, our very pains, and vexations, and inconveniences, to communing with our Maker! Happy, if we had not rather be absorbed in our petty cares, and little disturbances, provided we can contrive to make them the means of occupying our thoughts, filling up our minds, and drawing them away from that devout intercourse, which demands the liveliest exercise of our rational powers, the highest elevation of our spiritual affections! Is it not to be apprehended, that the dread of

being driven to this sacred intercourse, is one grand cause of that activity and restlessness, which sets the world in such perpetual motion?

Though we are ready to express a general sense of our confidence in Almighty goodness, yet what definite meaning do we annex to the expression? What practical evidences have we to produce, that we really do trust him? Does this trust deliver us from worldly anxiety? Does it exonerate us from the same perturbation of spirits, which those endure who make no such profession? Does it relieve the mind from doubt and distrust? Does it tranquillize the troubled heart, does it regulate its disorders, and compose its fluctuations? Does it sooth us under irritation? Does it support us under trials? Does it fortify us against temptations? Does it lead us to repose a full confidence in that Being whom we profess to trust? Does it produce in us, 'that work of righteousness, which is peace,' that effect of righteousness, which is 'quietness and assurance for ever?' Do we commit ourselves and our concerns to God in word, or in reality? Does this implicit reliance simplify our desires? Does it induce us to credit the testimony of his word and the promises of his Gospel? Do we not even entertain some secret suspicions of his faithfulness and truth in our hearts, when we persuade others and try to persuade ourselves that we unreservedly trust him?

In the preceding chapter we endeavoured to illustrate our want of love to God, by our not being as forward to *vindicate* the divine conduct as to justify that of an acquaintance. The same illustration may express our reluctance to *trust* in God. If a tried friend engage to do us a kindness, though he may not think it necessary to explain the particular man-

ner in which he intends to do it, we repose on his word. Assured of the result, we are neither very inquisitive about the mode nor the detail. But do we treat our Almighty friend with the same liberal confidence? Are we not murmuring because we cannot see all the process of his administration, and follow his movements step by step? Do we wait the development of his plan, in full assurance that the issue will be ultimately good? Do we trust that he is as abundantly willing as able, to do more for us than we can ask or think, if by our suspicions we do not offend him, if by our infidelity we do not provoke him? In short, do we not think ourselves utterly undone, when we have only but Providence to trust to?

We are perhaps ready enough to acknowledge God in our mercies, nay, we confess him in the ordinary enjoyments of life. In some of these common mercies, as in a bright day, a refreshing shower, a delightful scenery, a kind of sensitive pleasure, an hilarity of spirits, a sort of animal enjoyment, though of a refined nature, mixes itself with our devotional feelings; and though we confess and adore the bountiful Giver, we do it with a little mixture of self-complacency, and of human gratification, which he pardons and accepts.

But we must look for him in scenes less animating, we must acknowledge him on occasions less exhilarating, less sensibly gratifying. It is not only in his promises that God manifests his mercy. His threatenings are proofs of the same compassionate love. He threatens, not to punish, but by the warning, to snatch from the punishment.

We may also trace marks of his hand, not only in the awful visitations of life, not only in the severer

dispensations of his providence, but in vexations so trivial that we should hesitate to suspect that they are providential appointments, did we not know that our daily life is made up of unimportant circumstances rather than of great events. As they are, however, of sufficient importance to exercise the christian tempers and affections, we may trace the hand of our heavenly Father in those daily little disappointments and hourly vexations, which occur even in the most prosperous state, and which are inseparable from the condition of humanity. We must trace that same beneficent hand, secretly at work for our purification, our correction, our weaning from life; in the imperfections and disagreeableness of those who may be about us; in the preverseness of those with whom we transact business, and in those interruptions which break in on our favourite engagements.

We are perhaps too much addicted to our innocent delights, or we are too fond of our leisure, of our learned, even of our religious leisure. But while we say it is good for us to be here, the divine vision is withdrawn, and we are compelled to come down from the mount. Or, perhaps, we do not improve our retirement to the purposes for which it was granted, and to which we had resolved to devote it, and our time is broken in upon to make us more sensible of its value. Or we feel a complacency in our leisure, a pride in our books; perhaps we feel proud of the good things we are intending to say, or meditating to write, or preparing to do. A check is necessary, yet it is given in a way almost imperceptible. The hand that gives it is unseen, is unsuspected, yet it is the same gracious hand which directs the more important events of life. An importunate

application, a disqualifying, though not severe indisposition, a family avocation, a letter important to the writer, but unseasonable to us, breaks in on our projected privacy; calls us to a sacrifice of our inclination, to a renunciation of our own will. These incessant trials of temper, if well improved, may be more salutary to the mind, than the finest passage we had intended to read, or the sublimest sentiment we had fancied we should write.

Instead then of going in search of great mortifications, as a certain class of pious writers recommend, let us cheerfully bear, and diligently improve these inferior trials which God prepares for us. Submission to a cross which he inflicts, to a disappointment which he sends, to a contradiction of our self-love, which he appoints, is a far better exercise than great penances of our own choosing. Perpetual conquests over impatience, ill-temper, and self-will, indicate a better spirit than any self-imposed mortifications. We may traverse oceans, and scale mountains on uncommanded pilgrimages, without pleasing God; we may please him without any other exertion than by crossing our own will.

Perhaps you had been busying your imagination with some projected scheme, not only lawful, but laudable. The design was radically good, but the supposed value of your own agency, might too much interfere, might a little taint the purity of your best intentions. The motives were so mixed that it was difficult to separate them. Sudden sickness obstructed the design. You naturally lament the failure, not perceiving that, however good the work might be for others, the sickness was better for yourself. An act of charity was in your intention, but God saw that your soul required the exercise of a more dif-

ficult virtue; that humility and resignation, that the patience, acquiescence, and contrition of a sick bed, were more necessary for you. He accepts the meditated work as far as it was designed for his glory, but he calls his servant to other duties, which were more salutary for him, and of which the master was the better judge. He sets aside his work, and orders him to wait; the more difficult part of his task. As far as your motive was pure, you will receive the reward of your unperformed charity, though not the gratification of the performance. If it was not pure, you are rescued from the danger attending a right action performed on a worldly principle. You may be the better Christian though one good deed is subtracted from your catalogue.

By a life of activity and usefulness, you had perhaps attracted the public esteem. An animal activity had partly stimulated your exertions. The love of reputation begins to mix itself with your better motives. You do not, it is presumed, act entirely or chiefly for human applause; but you are too sensible to it. It is a delicious poison which begins to infuse itself into your purest cup. You acknowledge indeed the sublimity of higher motives, but do you never feel that, separated from this accompaniment of self, they would be too abstracted, too speculative, and might become too little productive both of activity and of sensible gratification? You begin to feel the human incentive necessary, and your spirits would flag if it were withdrawn.

This sensibility to praise would gradually tarnish the purity of your best actions. He who sees your heart, as well as your works, mercifully snatches you from the perils of prosperity. Malice is awakened. Your most meritorious actions are ascribed to the

most corrupt motives. You are attacked just where your character is least vulnerable. The enemies whom your success raised up, are raised up by God, less to punish than to save you. We are far from meaning that he can ever be the author of evil; he does not excite or approve the calumny, but he uses your calumniators as instruments of your purification. Your fame was too dear to you. It is a costly sacrifice, but God requires it. It must be offered up. You would gladly compound for any, for every other offering, but this is the offering he chooses: and while he graciously continues to employ you for his glory, he thus teaches you to renounce your own. He sends this trial as a test, by which you are to try yourself. He thus instructs you not to abandon your christian exertions, but to elevate the principle which inspired them, to defecate it from all impure admixtures.

By thus stripping the most engaging employments of this dangerous delight, by infusing some drops of salutary bitterness into our sweetest draught, by some of these ill-tasted but wholesome mercies, he graciously compels us to return to himself. By taking away the stays by which we are perpetually propping up our frail delights, they fall to the ground. We are as it were driven back to Him, who condescends to receive us, after we have tried every thing else, and after every thing else has failed us, and though he knows we should not have returned to him if every thing else had *not* failed us. He makes us feel our weakness, that we may have recourse to his strength; he makes us sensible of our hitherto unperceived sins, that we may take refuge in his everlasting compassion.

CHAP. IX.

CHRISTIANITY UNIVERSAL IN ITS REQUISITIONS.

It is not unusual to see people ged rid of some of the most awful injunctions, and emancipate themselves from some of the most solemn requisitions of Scripture, by affecting to believe that they do not apply to *them*. They consider them as belonging exclusively to the first age of the Gospel, and to the individuals to whom they were immediately addressed; consequently the necessity to observe them does not extend to persons under an established christianity, to hereditary Christians.

These exceptions are particularly applied to some of the leading doctrines, so forcibly and repeatedly pressed in the Epistles. The reasoners endeavour to persuade themselves that it was only the Ephesians 'who were dead in trespasses and sins'—that it was only the Galatians who were enjoined 'not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh'—that it was only the Philippians who were 'enemies to the cross of Christ.' They shelter themselves under the comfortable assurances of a geographical security. As they know that they are neither Ephesians, Galatians, nor Philippians, they have of course little or nothing to do with the reproofs, expostulations, or threatenings which were originally directed to the converts among those people. They console themselves with the belief that it was only these pagans who 'walked according to the course of this world'—who were 'strangers from the covenants of promise'—and who were 'without God in the world.'

But these self-satisfied critics would do well to learn that not only 'circumcision nor uncircumcision,'—but baptism or no baptism 'availeth nothing,' (I mean as a mere form) 'but a new creature.' An irreligious professor of christianity is as much 'a stranger and foreigner,' as a heathen; he is no more 'a fellow citizen of the saints,' and of the household of God 'than a Colossian or Galatian was, before the christian dispensation had reached them.

But if the persons to whom the Apostles preached had, before their conversion, no vices to which we are not liable, they had certainly difficulties afterwards from which we are happily exempt. There were indeed differences between them and us in external situations, in local circumstances, references which we ought certainly to take into the account in perusing the epistles. We allow that they were immediately, but we do not allow that they were exclusively, applicable to them. It would have been too limited an object for inspiration to have confined its instructions to any one period, when its purpose was the conversion and instruction of the whole unborn world. That these converts were miraculously 'called out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel'—that they were changed from gross blindness to a rapid illumination—that the embracing the new faith exposed them to persecution, reproach and ignominy—that the few had to struggle against the world—that laws, principalities and powers which support our faith opposed theirs—these are distinctions of which we ought not to lose sight: nor should we forget that not only all the disadvantages lay on their side in this antecedent condition, but that also all the superiority lies on ours in that which is subsequent.

But however the condition of the external state of the church might differ, there can be no necessity for any difference in the interior state of the individual christian. On whatever high principles of devotedness to God and love to man *they* were called to act, we are called to act on precisely the same. If their faith was called to more painful exertions, if their self-denial to harder sacrifices, if their renunciation of earthly things to severer trials, let us thankfully remember this would naturally be the case at the first introduction of a religion which had to combat with the pride, prejudices and enmity of corrupt nature, invested with temporal power:—That the hostile party would not fail to perceive how much the new religion opposed itself to their corruptions, and that it was introducing a spirit which was in direct and avowed hostility to the spirit of the world.

But while we are deeply thankful for the diminished difficulties of an established faith, let us never forget that christianity allows of no diminution in the temper, of no abatement in the Spirit, which constituted a Christian in the first ages of the church.

Christianity is precisely the same religion now as it was when our Saviour was upon earth. The spirit of the world is exactly the same now as it was then. And if the most eminent of the apostles, under the immediate guidance of inspiration were driven to lament their conflicts with their own corrupt nature, the power of temptation, combining with their natural propensities to evil, how can we expect that a lower faith, a slackened zeal, an abated diligence, and an inferior holiness will be accepted in *us?* Believers *then* were not called to higher degrees of purity, to a more elevated devotion, to a deeper hu-

mility, to greater rectitude, patience and sincerity than they are called to in the age in which we live. The promises are not limited to the period in which they were made, the aid of the Spirit is not confined to those on whom it was first poured out. It was expressly declared by St. Peter on its first effusion, to be promised not only 'to them and their children, but to all who were afar off, even to as many as the Lord their God should call.'

If then the same salvation be now offered as was offered at first, is it not obvious that it must be worked out in the same way? And as the same Gospel retains the same authority in all ages, so does it maintain the same universality among all ranks. Christianity has no by-laws, no particular exemptions, no individual immunities. That there is no appropriate way of attaining salvation for a prince or a philosopher, is probably one reason why greatness and wisdom have so often rejected it. But if rank cannot plead its privileges, genius cannot claim its distinctions. That Christianity does not owe its success to the arts of rhetoric or the sophistry of the schools, but that God intended by it 'to make foolish the wisdom of this world,' actually explains why 'the disputers of this world' have always been its enemies.

It would have been unworthy of the infinite God to have imparted a partial religion. There is but one 'gate,' and that a 'strait' one; but one 'way,' and that a 'narrow' one; there is but one salvation, and that a common one. The Gospel enjoins the same principles of love and obedience on all of every condition; offers the same aids under the same exigencies; the same supports under all trials; the same pardon to all penitents; the same Saviour to all be-

lievers; the same rewards to all who 'endure to the end.' The temptations of one condition and the trials of another may call for the exercise of different qualities, for the performance of different duties, but the same personal holiness is enjoined on all. External acts of virtue may be promoted by some circumstances, and impeded by others, but the graces of inward piety are of universal force, are of eternal obligation.

The universality of its requisitions is one of its most distinguishing characteristics. In the pagan world it seemed sufficient that a few exalted spirits, a few fine geniuses should soar to a vast superiority above the mass; but it was never expected that the mob of Rome or Athens, should aspire to any religious sentiments of feelings in common with Socrates or Epictetus. I say *religious* sentiments, because in matters of taste the distinctions were less striking, for the mob of Athens were competent critics in the dramatic art, while they were sunk in the most stupid and degrading idolatry. As to those of a higher class, while no subject in science, arts or learning was too lofty or too abstruse for their acquisition, no object in nature was too low, no conception of a depraved imagination was too impure for their worship. While the civil and political wisdom of the Romans was carried to such perfection that their code of laws has still a place in the most enlightened countries, their deplorably gross superstitions, rank them in point of religion with the savages of Africa. It shows how little a way that reason, which manifested itself with such unrivalled vigour in their poets, orators and historians, as to make them still models to ours, could go in what related to religion, when these polished people

in the objects of their worship are only on a par with the inhabitants of Otaheite.

It furnishes the most incontrovertible proof that the world by wisdom knew not God, that it was at the very time, and in the very country, in which knowledge and taste has attained their utmost perfection, when the porch and the academy had given laws to human intellect, that atheism first assumed a shape, and established itself into a school of philosophy. It was at the moment when the mental powers were carried to the highest pitch in Greece, that it was settled as an infallible truth in this philosophy, that the *senses were the highest natural light of mankind.* It was in the most enlightened age of Rome that this atheistical philosophy was transplanted thither, and that one of her most elegant poets adopted it, and rendered it popular by the bewitching graces of his verse.

It seems as if the most accomplished nations stood in the most pressing need of the light of Revelation; for it was not to the dark and stupid corners of the earth that the apostles had their earliest missions. One of St. Paul's first and noblest expositions of christian truth was made before the most august deliberative assembly in the world, though, by the way, it does not appear that more than one member of the areopagus was converted. In Rome some of the apostle's earliest converts belonged to the imperial palace. It was to the metropolis of cultivated Italy, it was to the 'regions of Achaia,' to the opulent and luxurious city of Corinth, in preference to the barbarous countries of the uncivilized world, that some of his first epistles were addressed.

Even natural religion was little understood by those who professed it; it was full of obscurity till

viewed by the clear light of the Gospel. Not only natural religion remained to be clearly comprehended, but reason itself remained to be carried to its highest pitch in the countries where Revelation is professed. Natural Religion could not see itself by its own light, Reason could not extricate itself from the labyrinth of error and ignorance in which false religion had involved the world. Grace has raised Nature. Revelation has given a lift to Reason, and taught her to despise the follies and corruptions which obscured her brightness. If Nature is now delivered from darkness, it was the helping hand of Revelation which raised her from the rubbish in which she lay buried.

Christianity has not only given us right conceptions of God, of his holiness, of the way in which he will be worshipped; it has not only given us principles to promote our happiness here, and to insure it hereafter; but it has really taught us what a proud philosophy arrogates to itself, the right use of reason. It has given us those principles of examining and judging, by which we are enabled to determine on the absurdity of false religions. 'For to what else can it be ascribed,' says the sagacious bishop Sherlock, 'that in every nation that names the name of Christ, even reason and nature see and condemn the follies, to which others are still, for want of the same help, held in subjection?'

Allowing however that Plato and Antonius seemed to have been taught of heaven, yet the object for which we contend is, that no provision was made for the vulgar. While a faint ray shone on the page of philosophy, the people were involved in darkness which might be felt. The million were left to live without knowledge, and to die without hope. For

what knowledge or what hope would be acquired from the preposterous, though amusing, and in many respects elegant mythology, which they might pick up in their poets, the belief of which seemed to be confined to the populace.

But there was no common principle of hope or fear, of faith or practice; no motive of consolation, no bond of charity, no communion of everlasting interest, no reversionary equality between the wise and the ignorant, the master and the slave, the Greek and the barbarian.

A religion was wanted which should be of general application. Christianity happily accommodated itself to the common exigence. It furnished an adequate supply to the universal want. Instead of perpetual but unexpiating sacrifices to appease imaginary deities,

> Gods, such as guilt makes welcome,

it presents 'one oblation once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' It presents one consistent scheme of morals growing out of one uniform system of doctrines; one perfect rule of practice, depending on one principle of faith; it offers grace to direct the one and to assist the other. It encircles the whole sphere of duty with the broad and golden zone of coalescing charity, stamped with the inscription 'a new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another.' Christianity, instead of destroying the distinctions of rank, or breaking in on the regulations of society, by this universal precept, furnishes new fences to its order, additional security to its repose, and fresh strength to its subordinations.

Were this command, so inevitably productive of that peculiarly Christian injunction of 'doing to others as we would they should do unto us,' uniformly observed, the whole frame of society would be cemented and consolidated into one indissoluble bond of universal brotherhood. This divinely enacted law is the seminal principle of justice, charity, patience, forbearance, in short, of all social virtue. That it does not produce these excellent effects, is not owing to any defect in the principle, but in our corrupt nature, which so reluctantly, so imperfectly obeys it. If it were conscientiously adopted, and substantially acted upon, received in its very spirit, and obeyed from the ground of the heart, human laws might be abrogated, courts of justice abolished, and treaties of morality burnt; war would be no longer an art, nor military tactics a science. We should suffer long and be kind, and so far from 'seeking that which is another's,' we should not even 'seek our own.'

But let not the soldier or the lawyer be alarmed.—Their craft is in no danger. The world does not intend to act upon the divine principle which would injure their professions; and till this only revolution which good men desire actually takes place, our fortunes will not be secure without the exertions of the one, nor our lives without the protection of the other.

All the virtues have their appropriate place and rank in Scripture. They are introduced as individually beautiful and as reciprocally connected, like the graces in the mythologic dance. But perhaps no christian grace ever sat to the hand of a more consummate master than Charity. Her incomparable painter, St. Paul, has drawn her at full length in

all her fair proportions. Every attitude is full of grace, every lineament of beauty. The whole delineation is perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Who can look at this finished piece without blushing at his own want of likeness to it? Yet if this conscious dissimilitude induce a cordial desire of resemblance, the humiliation will be salutary. Perhaps a more frequent contemplation of this exquisite figure, accompanied with earnest endeavours for a growing resemblance, would gradually lead us, not barely to admire the portrait, but would at length assimilate us to the divine original.

CHAP. X.

CHRISTIAN HOLINESS.

CHRISTIANITY then, as we have attempted to show in the preceding chapter, exhibits no different standards of goodness applicable to different stations or characters. No one can be allowed to rest in a low degree, and plead his exemption for aiming no higher. No one can be secure in any state of piety below that state which would not have been enjoined on all, had not all been entitled to the means of attaining it.

Those who keep their pattern in their eye, though they may fail of the highest attainments, will not be satisfied with such as are low. The striking inferiority will excite compunction; compunction will stimulate them to press on, which those never do

who, losing sight of their standard, are satisfied with the height they have reached.

He is not likely to be the object of God's favour, who takes his determined stand on the very lowest step in the scale of perfection; who does not even aspire above it; whose aim seems to be, not so much to please God as to escape punishment. Many however will doubtless be accepted, though their progress has been small; their difficulties may have been great, their natural capacity weak, their temptation strong, and their instruction defective.

Revelation has not only furnished injunctions but motives to holiness; not only motives, but examples and authorities. 'Be ye therefore perfect' (according to your measure and degree,) 'as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' And what says the Old Testament? It accords with the New—'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'

This was the injunction of God himself, not given exclusively to Moses, to the leader and legislator, or to a few distinguished officers, or to a selection of eminent men, but to an immense body of people, even to the whole assembled host of Israel; to men of all ranks, professions, capacities and characters, to the minister of religion, and to the uninstructed, to enlightened rulers and to feeble women. 'God,' says an excellent writer,* 'had antecedently given to his people particular laws, suited to their several exigencies and various conditions; but the command to be holy was a general (might he not have said a universal) law.'

'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?' This is perhaps the sub-

* Saurin.

limest apostrophe of praise (rendered more striking by its interrogatory form,) which the Scriptures have recorded. It makes a part of the first song of gratulation which is to be found in the treasury of sacred poetry. This epithet of *holy* is more frequently affixed to the name of God than any other. His *mighty* name is less often invoked, than his *holy* name. To offend against this attribute is represented as more heinous than to oppose any other. It has been remarked that the impiety of the Assyrian monarch is not described by his hostiiity against the great, the almighty God, but it is made an aggravation of his crime that he had committed it against *the Holy One of Israel.*

When God condescended to give a pledge for the performance of his promise, he swears by his *holiness*, as if it were the distinguishing quality which was more especially binding. It seems connected and interwoven with all the divine perfections. Which of his excellences can we contemplate as separated from this? Is not his justice stamped with sanctity? It is free from any tincture of vindictiveness, and is therefore a holy justice. His mercy has none of the partiality or favouritism, or capricious fondness of human kindness, but is a holy mercy. His holiness is not more the source of his mercies than of his punishments. If his holiness in his severities to us wanted a justification, there cannot be at once a more substantial and more splendid illustration of it than the noble passage already quoted, for he is called 'glorious in holiness' immediately after he had vindicated the honour of his name, by the miraculous destruction of the army of Pharoah.

Is it not then a necessary consequence growing out of his perfections, 'that a righteous God loveth

righteousness,' that he will of course require in his creatures a desire to imitate as well as to adore that attribute by which He himself loves to be distinguished? We cannot indeed, like God, be essentially holy. In an infinite being it is a substance, in a created being it is only an accident: God is the essence of holiness, but we can have no holiness, nor any other good thing, but what we derive from him —It is his prerogative, but our privilege.

If God loves holiness because it is his image, he must consequently hate sin because it defaces his image. If he glorifies his own mercy and goodness in rewarding virtue, he no less vindicates the honour of his holiness in the punishment of vice. A perfect God can no more approve of sin in his creatures than he can commit it himself. He may forgive sin on his own conditions, but there are no conditions on which he can be reconciled to it. The infinite goodness of God may delight in the beneficial purposes to which his infinite wisdom has made the sins of his creatures subservient, but sin itself will always be abhorrent to his nature. His wisdom may turn it to a merciful end, but his indignation at the offence cannot be diminished. He loves man, for he cannot but love his own work; he hates sin, for that was man's own invention, and no part of the work which God had made. Even in the imperfect administration of human laws impunity of crimes would be construed into approbation of them.*

The law of holiness then, is a law binding on all persons without distinction, not limited to the period nor to the people to whom it was given. It

* See Charnock on the Attributes.

reaches through the whole Jewish dispensation, and extends with wider demands and higher sanctions to every christian, of every denomination, of every age, and every country.

A more sublime motive cannot be assigned why we should be holy, than because 'the Lord our God is holy.' Men of the world have no objection to the terms virtue, morality, integrity, rectitude; but they associate something overacted, not to say hypocritical, with the term holiness, and neither use it in a good sense when applied to others, nor would wish to have it applied to themselves; but make it over, with a little suspicion, and not a little derision, to puritans and enthusiasts.

This suspected epithet, however, is surely rescued from every injurious association, if we consider it as the chosen attribute of the Most High. We do not presume to apply the terms virtue, probity, morality, to God; but we ascribe holiness to him because he first ascribed it to himself, as the aggregate and consummation of all his perfections.

Shall so imperfect a being as man then, ridicule the application of this term to others, or be ashamed of it himself? There is a cause indeed which should make him ashamed of the appropriation; that of not deserving it. This comprehensive appellation includes all the christian graces; all the virtues in their just proportion, order, and harmony; in all their bearings, relations, and dependencies. And as in God glory and holiness are united, so the apostle combines 'sanctification and honour' as the glory of man.

Traces more or less of the holiness of God may be found in his works, to those who view them with the eye of faith. They are more plainly visi-

ble in his providences; but it is in his word that we must chiefly look for the manifestations of his holiness. He is every where described as perfectly holy in himself, as a model to be imitated by his creatures, and, though with an interval immeasurable, as imitable by them.

The great doctrine of redemption is inseparably connected with the doctrine of sanctification. As an admirable writer has observed, 'If the blood of Christ reconcile us to the justice of God, the spirit of Christ is to reconcile us to the holiness of God.' When we are told therefore that Christ is made unto us 'righteousness,' we are in the same place taught that he is made unto us sanctification; that is, he is both justifier and sanctifier. In vain shall we deceive ourselves by resting on his sacrifice, while we neglect to imitate his example.

The glorious spirits which surrounded the throne of God are not represented as singing hallelujahs to his omnipotence, nor even to his mercy, but to that attribute which, as with a glory, encircles all the rest. They perpetually cry, holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; and it is observable, that the angels which adore him for his holiness are the ministers of his justice. Those pure intelligences perceive, no doubt, that this union of attributes constitutes the divine perfection.

This infinitely blessed Being then, to whom angels and archangels, and all the hosts of heaven are continually ascribing holiness, has commanded us to be holy. To be holy because God is holy, is both an argument and a command. An argument founded on the perfections of God, and a command to imitate him. This command is given to creatures, fallen indeed, but to whom God gra-

ciously promises strength for the imitation. If in God holiness implies an aggregate of perfections; in man, even in his low degree, it is an incorporation of the christian graces.

The holiness of God indeed is confined by no limitation; ours is bounded, finite, imperfect. Yet let us be sedulous to extend our little sphere. Let our desires be large, though our capacities are contracted. Let our aims be lofty, though our attainments are low. Let us be solicitous that no day pass without some augmentation of our holiness, some added height in our aspirations, some wider expansion in the compass of our virtues. Let us strive every day for some superiority to the preceding day; something that shall distinctly mark the passing scene with progress; something that shall inspire an humble hope that we are rather less unfit for heaven to-day than we were yesterday.

The celebrated artist who has recorded that he passed no day without drawing a line, drew it, not for repetition, but for progress; not to produce a given number of strokes, but to forward his work, to complete his design. The Christian, like the painter, does not draw his lines at random; he has a model to imitate, as well as an outline to fill. Every touch conforms him more and more to the great original. He who has transfused most of the life of God into his soul, has copied it most successfully.

'To *seek* happiness,' says one of the fathers, 'is to desire God, and to find him *is* that happiness.' Our very happiness therefore is not our independent property; it flows from that eternal mind which is the source and sum of happiness. In vain we look for felicity in all around us. It can only be

found in that original fountain, whence we, and all we are and have, are derived. Where then is the imaginary wise man of the school of Zeno? what is the perfection of virtue supposed by Aristotle? They have no existence but in the romance of philosophy. Happiness must be imperfect in an imperfect state. Religion, it is true, is initial happiness, and points to its perfection: but as the best men possess it but imperfectly, they cannot be perfectly happy. Nothing can confer completeness which is itself incomplete. 'With Thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life, and in Thy light only we shall see light.'*

Whatever shall still remain wanting in our attainments, and much will still remain, let this last, greatest, highest consideration stimulate our languid exertions, that God has negatively promised the beatific vision, the enjoyment of his presence, to this attainment, by specifically proclaiming, that without holiness no man shall see his face. To know God is the rudiments of that eternal life which will hereafter be perfected by seeing him. As there is no stronger reason why we must not look for perfect happiness in this life, than because there is no perfect holiness, so the nearer advances we make to the one, the greater progress we shall make towards the other; we must cultivate here those tendencies and tempers which must be carried to perfection in a happier clime. But as holiness is the concomitant of happiness, so must it be its precursor. As sin has destroyed our happiness, so sin must be destroyed before our happiness can be restored. Our nature must be renovated before our felicity can be

* See Leighton on Happiness.

established. This is according to the nature of things, as well as agreeable to the law and will of God. Let us then carefully look to the subduing in our inmost hearts all those dispositions that are unlike God; all those actions, thoughts and tendencies that are contrary to God.

Independently therefore of all the other motives to holiness which religion suggests, independently of the fear of punishment; independently even of the hope of glory, let us be holy from this ennobling, elevating motive, because the Lord our God is holy. And when our virtue flags, let it be renovated by this imperative injunction, backed by this irresistible argument. The motive for imitation, and the Being to be imitated, seem almost to identify us with infinity. It is a connexion which endears, an assimilation which dignifies, a resemblance which elevates. The apostle has added to the prophet an assurance which makes the crown and consummation of the promise, 'that though we know not yet what we shall be, yet we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

In what a beautiful variety of glowing expressions, and admiring strains, do the Scripture worthies delight to represent God; not only in relation to what he is to them, but to the supreme excellence of his own transcendant perfections! They expatiate, they amplify, they dwell with unwearied iteration on the adorable theme; they ransack language, they exhaust all the expressions of praise, and wonder, and admiration; all the images of astonishment and delight, to laud and magnify his glorious name. They praise him, they bless him, they worship him, they glorify him, they give thanks to him for his great

glory, saying 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory.'

They glorify Him relatively to themselves—'I will magnify Thee, O Lord my strength—My help cometh of God—The Lord himself is the portion of my inheritance.' At another time soaring with a noble disinterestedness, and quite losing sight of self and all created glories, they adore him for his own incommunicable excellences. 'Be Thou exalted, O God, in thine own strength.'—'Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.' Then bursting to a rapture of adoration, and burning with a more intense flame, they cluster his attributes—'To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be honour and glory for ever and ever.' *One* is lost in admiration of his wisdom—his ascription is 'to the only *wise* God.' *Another* in triumphant strains overflows with transport at the consideration of the attribute on which we have been descanting: 'O Lord, who is like unto Thee, there is none holy as the Lord.'—'Sing praises unto the Lord, oh ye saints of his, and give thanks unto him for a remembrance of his holiness.'

The prophets and apostles were not deterred from pouring out the overflowings of their fervent spirits, they were not restrained from celebrating the perfections of their Creator, through the cold-hearted fear of being reckoned enthusiasts. The saints of old were not prevented from breathing out their rapturous hosannahs to the King of saints, through the coward dread of being branded as fanatical. The conceptions of their minds dilating with the view of the glorious constellation of the Divine attributes; and the affections of their hearts warming with the thought, that those attributes were all concentrated

in mercy—they display a sublime oblivion of themselves—they forget every thing but God. Their own wants dwindled to a point. Their own concerns, nay the universe itself, shrink into nothing. They seem absorbed in the effulgence of Deity, lost in the radiant beams of infinite glory.

CHAP. XI.

ON THE COMPARATIVELY SMALL FAULTS AND VIRTUES.

THE 'Fishers of Men,' as if exclusively bent on catching the greater sinners, often make the interstices of the moral net so wide, that it cannot retain those of more ordinary size, which every where abound. Their draught might be more abundant, were not the meshes so large that the smaller sort, aided by their own lubricity, escape the toils and slip through. Happy to find themselves not bulky enough to be entangled, they plunge back again into their native element, enjoy their escape, and hope they may safely wait to grow bigger before they are in danger of being caught.

It is of more importance than we are aware, or are willing to allow, that we take care diligently to practise the smaller virtues, avoid scrupulously the lesser sins, and bear patiently inferior trials; for the sin of habitually yielding, or the grace of habitually resisting in comparatively small points, tends in no inconsiderable degree to produce that vigour or that debility of mind on which hangs victory or defeat.

Conscience is moral sensation. It is the hasty perception of good and evil, the peremptory decision of the mind to adopt the one or avoid the other. Providence has furnished the body with senses, and the soul with conscience, as a *tact* by which to shrink from the approach of danger; as a prompt feeling to supply the deductions of reasoning; as a spontaneous impulse to precede a train of reflections for which the suddenness and surprise of the attack allow no time. An enlightened conscience if kept tenderly alive by a continual attention to its admonitions, would especially preserve us from those smaller sins, and stimulate us to those lesser duties which we are falsely apt to think are too insignificant to be brought to the bar of religion, too trivial to be weighed by the standard of Scripture.

By cherishing this quick feeling of rectitude, light and sudden as the flash from heaven, and which is in fact the motion of the spirit, we intuitively reject what is wrong before we have time to examine why it is wrong, and seize on what is right before we have time to examine why it is right. Should we not then be careful how we extinguish this sacred spark? Will any thing be more likely to extinguish it than to neglect its hourly momentos to perform the smaller duties, and to avoid the lesser faults, which, as they in a good measure make up the sum of human life, will naturally fix and determine our character, that creature of habits? Will not our neglect or observance of it, incline or indispose us for those more important duties of which these smaller ones are connecting links?

The vices derive their existence from wildness, confusion, disorganization. The discord of the passions is owing to their having different views, con-

flicting aims, and opposite ends. The rebellious vices have no common head; each is all to itself. They promote their own operations by disturbing those of others, but in disturbing they do not destroy them. Though they are all of one family, they live on no friendly terms. Profligacy hates covetousness as much as if it were a virtue. The life of every sin is a life of conflict, which occasions the torment, but not the death of its opposite. Like the fabled brood of the serpent, the passions spring up, armed against each other, but they fail to complete the resemblance for they do not effect their mutual destruction.

But without union the christian graces could not be perfected, and the smaller virtues are the threads and filaments which gently but firmly tie them together. There is an attractive power in goodness which draws each part to the other. This concord of the virtues is derived from their having one common centre in which all meet. In vice there is a strong repulsion. Though bad men seek each other, they do not love each other. Each seeks the other in order to promote his own purposes, while he hates him by whom his purposes are promoted.

The lesser qualities of the human character are like the lower people in a country; they are numerically, if not individually important. If well regulated they become valuable from that very circumstance of numbers, which, under a negligent administration, renders them formidable. The peace of the individual mind and of the nation, is materially affected by the discipline in which these inferior orders are maintained. Laxity and neglect in both cases are subversive of all good government.

But if we may be allowed to glance from earth to heaven, perhaps the beauty of the lesser virtues may

be still better illustrated by that long and luminous track made up of minute and almost imperceptible stars, which though separately too inconsiderable to attract attention, yet from their number and confluence, form that soft and shining stream of light every where discernible, and which always corresponds to the same fixed stars, as the smaller virtues do to their concomitant great ones.—Without pursuing the metaphor to the classic fiction that the Galaxy was the road through which the ancient heroes went to heaven, may we not venture to say that Christians will make their way thither more pleasant by the consistent practice of the minuter virtues?

Every Christian should consider religion as a fort which he is called to defend. The meanest soldier in the army if he add patriotism to valour, will fight as earnestly as if the glory of the contest depended on his single arm. But he brings his watchfulness as well as his courage into action. He strenuously defends every pass he is appointed to guard, without inquiring whether it be great or small. There is not any defect in religion or morals so little as to be of no consequence. Worldly things may be little because their aim and end may be little. Things are great or small, not according to their ostensible importance, but according to the magnitude of their object, and the importance of their consequences.

The acquisition of even the smallest virtue being, as has been before observed, an actual conquest over the opposite vice, doubles our moral strength. The spiritual enemy has one subject less, and the conqueror one virtue more.

By allowed negligence in small things, we are not aware how much we injure religion in the eye of the

world. How can we expect people to believe that we are in earnest in great points, when they see that we cannot withstand a trivial temptation, against which resistance would have been comparatively easy? At a distance they hear with respect of our general characters. They become domesticated with us, and discover the same failings, littleness, and bad tempers, as they have been accustomed to meet with in the most ordinary persons.

If Milton, in one of his letters to a learned foreigner who had visited him, could congratulate himself on the consciousness that in that visit he had been found equal to his reputation, and had supported in private conversation his high character as an author; shall not the Christian be equally anxious to support the credit of his holy profession, by not betraying in familiar life any temper inconsistent with religion?

It is not difficult to attract respect on great occasions, where we are kept in order by knowing that the public eye is fixed upon us. It is easy to maintain a regard to our dignity in a 'Symposiack, or an academical dinner;' but to labour to maintain it in the recesses of domestic privacy requires more watchfulness, and is no less the duty, than it will be the habitual practice, of the consistent Christian.

Our neglect of inferior duties is particularly injurious to the minds of our dependants and servants. If they see us 'weak and infirm of purpose,' peevish, irresolute, capricious, passionate, or inconsistent, in our daily conduct, which comes under their immediate observation, and which comes also within their power of judging, they will not give us credit for those higher qualities which we may possess, and those superior duties which

we may be more careful to fulfil. Neither their capacity nor their opportunities, may enable them to judge of the orthodoxy of the head; but there will be obvious and decisive proofs to the meanest capacity, of the state and temper of the heart. Our greater qualities will do them little good, while our lesser but incessant faults do them much injury. Seeing us so defective in the daily course of domestic conduct, though they will obey us because they are obliged to it, they will neither love nor esteem us enough to be influenced by our advice, nor to be governed by our instructions, on those great points which every conscientious head of a family will be careful to inculcate on all about him. It demands no less circumspection to be a *Christian*, than to be a '*hero*, to one's valet de chambre.'

In all that relates to God and to himself, the Christian knows of no small faults. He considers all allowed and wilful sins, whatever be their magnitude, as an offence against his Maker. Nothing that offends him can be insignificant. Nothing that contributes to fasten on ourselves a wrong habit can be trifling. Faults which we are accustomed to consider as small are repeated without compunction. The habit of committing them is confirmed by the repetition. Frequency renders us at first indifferent, then insensible. The hopelessness attending a long indulged custom generates carelessness, till for want of exercise the power of resistance is first weakened, then destroyed.

But there is a still more serious point of view in which the subject may be considered. Do small faults, continually repeated, always retain their originally diminutiveness? Is any axiom more established than that all evil is of a progressive

nature? Is a bad temper which is never repressed, no worse after years of indulgence, than when we at first gave the reins to it? Does that which we first allowed ourselves under the name of harmless levity on serious subjects, never proceed to profaneness? Does what was once admired as proper spirit, never grow into pride, never swell into insolence? Does the habit of incorrect narrative, or loose talking, or allowed hyperbole, never lead to falsehood, never settle in deceit? Before we positively determine that small faults are innocent, we must undertake to prove that they shall never outgrow their primitive dimensions; we must ascertain that the infant shall never become a giant.

Procrastination is reckoned among the most venial of our faults, and sits so lightly on our minds that we scarcely apologize for it. But who can assure us, that had not the assistance we had resolved to give to one friend under distress, or the advice to another under temptation, to-day been delayed, and from mere sloth and indolence been put off till to-morrow, it might not have preserved the fortunes of the one, or saved the soul of the other?

It is not enough that we perform duties; we must perform them at the right time. We must do the duty of every day in its own season. Every day has its own imperious duties; we must not depend upon to-day for fulfilling those which we neglected yesterday, for to-day might not have been granted us. To-morrow will be equally peremptory in its demands; and the succeeding day, if we live to see it, will be ready with its proper claims.

Indecision, though it is not so often caused by reflection as by the want of it, yet may be as mischievous; for if we spend too much time in balancing probabilities, the period for action is lost. While we are ruminating on difficulties which may never occur, reconciling differences which perhaps do not exist, and poising in opposite scales things of nearly the same weight, the opportunity is lost of producing that good, which a firm and manly decision would have effected.

Idleness, though itself 'the most unperforming of all the vices,' is however the pass through which they all enter, the stage on which they all act. Though supremely passive itself, it lends a willing hand to all evil, practical as well as speculative. It is the abettor of every sin whoever commits it, the receiver of all booty, whoever is the thief. If it does nothing itself, it connives at all the mischief that is done by others.

Vanity is exceedingly misplaced when ranked as she commonly is, in the catalogue of small faults. It is under her character of harmlessness that she does all her mischief. She is indeed often found in the society of great virtues. She does not follow in the train, but mixes herself with the company, and by mixing mars it. The use our spiritual enemy makes of her is a master stroke. When he cannot prevent us from doing right actions, he can accomplish his purpose almost as well 'by making us vain of them.' When he cannot deprive the public of our benevolence, he can defeat the effect to ourselves by poisoning the principle. When he cannot rob others of the good effect of the deed, he can gain his point by robbing the doer of his reward.

Peevishness is another of the minor miseries. Human life, though sufficiently unhappy, cannot contrive to furnish misfortunes so often as the passionate and the peevish can supply impatience. To commit our reason and temper to the mercy of every acquaintance, and of every servant, is not making the wisest use of them. If we recollect that violence and peevishness are the common resource of those whose knowledge is small, and whose arguments are weak, our very pride might lead us to subdue our passion, if we had not a better principle to resort to. Anger is the common refuge of insignificance. People who feel their character to be slight, hope to give it weight by inflation: But the blown bladder at its fullest distention is still empty. Sluggish characters, above all, have no right to be passionate. They should be contented with their own congenial faults. Dulness however has its impetuosities and its fluctuations as well as genius. It is on the coast of heavy Bœotia that the Euripus exhibits its unparalleled restlessness and agitation.

Trifling is ranked among the venial faults. But if time be one grand talent given us in order to our securing eternal life; if we trifle away that time so as to lose that eternal life, on which by not trifling we might have laid hold, then will it answer the end of sin. A life devoted to trifles not only takes away the inclination, but the capacity for higher pursuits. The truths of Christianity have scarcely more influence on a frivolous than on a profligate character. If the mind be so absorbed, not merely with what is vicious, but with what is useless, as to be thoroughly disinclined to the activities of a life of piety, it matters little what the cause is which so

disinclines it. If these habits cannot be accused of great moral evil, yet it argues a low state of mind; that a being who has an eternity at stake can abandon itself to trivial pursuits. If the great concern of life cannot be secured without habitual watchfulness, how is it to be secured by habitual carelessness? It will afford little comfort to the trifler, when at the last reckoning he gives in his long negative catalogue, that the more ostensible offender was worse employed. The trifler will not be weighed in the scale with the profligate, but in the balance of the sanctuary.

Some men make for themselves a sort of code of the lesser morals, of which they settle both the laws and the chronology. They fix 'the climacterics of the mind;'* determine at what period such a vice may be adopted without discredit, at what age one bad habit may give way to another more in character. Having settled it as a matter of course, that to a certain age certain faults are natural, they proceed to act as if they thought them necessary.

But let us not practise on ourselves the gross imposition to believe that any failing, much less any vice, is necessarily appended to any state or any age, or that it is irresistible at any. We may accustom ourselves to talk of vanity and extravagance as belonging to the young; and avarice and peevishness to the old, till the next step will be that we shall think ourselves justified in adopting them. Whoever is eager to find excuses for vice and folly, will feel his own backwardness to practise them much diminished.

* Dr. Johnson.

C'est le premier pas qui coute. It is only to make out an imaginary necessity, and then we easily fall into the necessity we have imagined. Providence has established no such association. There is, it is true, more danger of certain faults under certain circumstances; and some temptations are stronger at some periods: but it is a proof that they are not irresistible because *all* do not fall into them. The evil is in ourselves, who mitigate the discredit by the supposed necessity. The prediction, like the dream of the astrologer, creates the event instead of foretelling it. But there is no supposition can be made of a bad case which will justify the making it our own: Nor will general positions ever serve for individual apologies.—Who has not known persons who, though they retain the sound health and vigour of active life, sink prematurely into sloth and inactivity, solely on the ground that these dispositions are fancied to be unavoidably incident to advancing years. They demand the indulgence before they feel the infirmity. Indolence thus forges a dismission from duty before the discharge is issued out by providence. No.—Let us endeavour to meet the evils of the several conditions and periods of life with submission, but it is an offence to their divine dispenser to forestall them.

But we have still a saving clause for ourselves, whether the evil be of a greater or lesser magnitude. If the fault be great, we lament the inability to resist it; if small, we deny the importance of so doing, we plead that we cannot withstand a great temptation, and that a small one is not worth withstanding. But if the temptation or the fault be great, we should resist it on account of that very magnitude; if small, the giving it up can cost but

little; and the conscientious habit of conquering the less will confer considerable strength towards subduing the greater.

There is again, a sort of splendid character, which winding itself up occasionally to certain shining actions, thinks itself fully justified in breaking loose from the shackles of restraint in smaller things: it makes no scruple to indemnify itself for these popular deeds by indulgences which, though allowed, are far from innocent. It thus secures to itself praise and popularity by what is sure to gain it, and immunity from censure in indulging the favourite fault, practically exclaiming, 'Is it not a little one?'

Vanity is at the bottom of almost all, may we not say, of all our sins? We think more of signalizing than of saving ourselves. We overlook the hourly occasions which occur of serving, of obliging, of comforting those around us, while we sometimes, not unwillingly perform an act of notorious generosity. The habit however in the former case better indicates the disposition and bent of the mind, than the solitary act of splendor. The apostle does not say whatsoever *great* things ye do, but 'whatsoever things ye do, do *all* to the glory of God.' Actions are less weighed by their bulk than their motive. Virtues are less measured by their splendor than their principle. The racer proceeds in his course more effectually by a steady unslackened pace, than by starts of violent but unequal exertion.

That great abstract of moral law, of which we have elsewhere spoken,* that rule of the highest court of appeal, set up in his own bosom, to which

* Chapter ix.

every man can always resort, 'all things that ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them:'—This law, if faithfully obeyed, operating as an infallible remedy for all the disorders of self-love, would, by throwing its partiality into the right scale, establish the exercise of all the smaller virtues. Its strict observance would not only put a stop to all injustice but to all unkindness: not only to oppressive acts, but to unfeeling language. Even haughty looks and supercilious gestures would be banished from the face of society, did we ask ourselves how we should like to receive what we are not ashamed to give.

Till we thus morally transmute place, person, and circumstance with those of our brother, we shall never treat him with the tenderness this gracious law enjoins. Small virtues and small offences are only so by comparison. To treat a fellow-creature with harsh language, is not indeed a crime like robbing him of his estate or destroying his reputation. They are however all the offspring of the same family.—They are the same in quality though not in degree. All flow, though in streams of different magnitude, from the same fountain; all are indications of a departure from that principle which is included in the law of love. The consequences they involve are not less certain; though they are less important.

The reason why what are called religious people often differ so little from others in small trials is, that instead of bringing religion to their aid in their lesser vexations, they either leave the disturbance to prey upon their minds, or apply to false reliefs for its removal. Those who are rendered unhappy by frivolous troubles, seek comfort in frivolous en-

joyments. But we should apply the same remedy to ordinary trials, as to great ones; for as small disquietudes spring from the same cause as great trials, namely, the uncertain and imperfect condition of human life, so they require the same remedy. Meeting common cares with a right spirit would impart a smoothness to the temper, a spirit of cheerfulness to the heart, which would mightily break the force of heavier trials.

You apply to the power of religion in great evils. —Why does it not occur to you to apply to it in the less? Is it that you think the instrument greater than the occasion demands. It is not too great if the lesser one will not produce the effect, or if it produce it in the wrong way; for there is such a thing as putting an evil out of sight without curing it. You would apply to religion on the loss of your child—apply to it on the loss of your temper. Throw in this wholesome tree to sweeten the bitter waters. As no calamity is too great for the power of christianity to mitigate, so none is too small to experience its beneficial results. Our behaviour under the ordinary accidents of life forms a characteristic distinction between different classes of Christians. The least advanced, resort to religion on great occasions; the deeper proficient resorts to it on all. What makes it appear of so little comparative value is, that the medicine prepared by the Great Physician is thrown by instead of being taken. The patient thinks not of it but in extreme cases. A remedy, however potent, not applied, can produce no effect. But he who has adopted one fixed principle for the government of his life, will try to keep it in perpetual exercise. An acquaintance with the nature of human evils and of their remedy,

would check that spirit of complaint which so much abounds, and which often makes so little difference between people professing religion and those who profess it not.

If the duties in question are not great, they become important by the constant demand that is made for them. They have been called 'the small coin of human life,' and on their perpetual and unobstructed circulation depends much of the comfort, as well as convenience of its transactions. They make up in frequency what they want in magnitude. How few of us are called to carry the doctrines of Christianity into distant lands! But which of us is not called every day to adorn those doctrines, by gentleness in our own carriage, by kindness and forbearance to all about us?

In performing the unostensible duties, there is no incentive from vanity. No love of fame inspires that virtue, of which fame will never hear. There can be but one motive, and that the purest, for the exercise of virtues, the report of which will never reach beyond the little circle whose happiness they promote. They do not fill the world with our renown, but they fill our own family with comfort, and if they have the love of God for their principle, they will have his favour for their reward.

In this enumeration of faults, we include not sins of infirmity, inadvertency, and surprise, to which even the most sincere Christians are but too liable. What are here adverted to are allowed, habitual, and unresisted faults: Habitual, because unresisted, and allowed from the notion that they are too inconsiderable to call for resistance. Faults into which we are betrayed through surprise and inadvertency, though that is no reason for committing them, may

not be without their uses: they renew the salutary conviction of our sinful nature, make us little in our own eyes, increase our sense of dependence, promote watchfulness, deepen humility and quicken repentance.

We must however be careful not to entangle the conscience or embarrass the spirit by groundless apprehensions. We have a merciful father, not a hard master to deal with. We must not harass our minds with a suspicious dread, as if by a needless rigour the Almighty were laying snares to entrap us, nor be terrified with imaginary fears, as if he were on the watch to punish every casual error!— To be immutable and impeccable belongs not to humanity. He, who made us, best knows of what we are made. Our compassionate High Priest will bear with much infirmity, will pardon much involuntary weakness.

But knowing, as every man must know who looks into his own heart, the difficulties he has from the intervention of his evil tempers, in serving God faithfully, and still however earnestly desirous of serving him, is it not to be lamented that he is not more solicitous to remove his hindrances by trying to avoid those inferior sins, and resisting those lesser temptations, and practising those smaller virtues, the neglect of which obstructs his way, and keeps him back in the performance of higher duties. Instead of little renunciations being grievous, and petty self-denials a hardship, they in reality soften grievances, diminish hardship. They are the private drill which trains for public service.

If, as we have repeatedly observed, the principle is the test of the action, we are hourly furnished with occasions of showing our piety by the spirit in

which the quiet unobserved actions of life are performed. The sacrifices may be too little to be observed except by him to whom they are offered. But small solicitudes, and demonstrations of attachment, scarcely perceptible to any eye but his for whom they are made, bear the true character of love to God, as they are the infallible marks of affection to our fellow creatures.

By enjoining small duties, the spirit of which is every where implied in the gospel, God, as it were, seems contriving to render the great ones easy to us. He makes the light yoke of Christ still lighter, not by abridging duty, but by increasing its facility through its familiarity. These little habits at once indicate the sentiment of the soul and improve it.

It is an awful consideration and one which every Christian should bring home to his own bosom, whether small faults wilfully persisted in, may not in time not only dim the light of conscience, but extinguish the spirit of grace; whether the power of resistance against great sins may not be finally withdrawn as a just punishment for having neglected to exert it against small ones.

Let us endeavour to maintain in our minds the awful impression that perhaps among the first objects which may meet our eyes when we open them on the eternal world, may be that tremendous book, in which, together with our great and actual sins, may be recorded in no less prominent characters, the ample page of omissions, of neglected opportunities, and even of fruitless good intentions, of which indolence, indecision, thoughtlessness, vanity, trifling and procrastination concurred to frustrate the execution,

CHAP. XII.

Self-Examination.

In this stage of general inquiry, every kind of ignorance is esteemed dishonourable. In almost every sort of knowledge there is a competition for superiority. Intellectual attainments are never to be undervalued. Learning is the best human thing. All knowledge is excellent as far as it goes, and as long as it lasts. But how short is the period before 'tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away!'

Shall we then esteem it dishonourable to be ignorant in any thing which relates to life and literature, to taste and science, and not feel ashamed to live in ignorance of our own hearts?

To have a flourishing estate and a mind in disorder; to keep exact accounts with a steward and no reckoning with our Maker; to have an accurate knowledge of loss or gain in our business, and to remain utterly ignorant whether our spiritual concerns are improving or declining; to be cautious in ascertaining at the end of every year, how much we have increased or diminished our fortune, and to be careless whether we have incurred profit or loss in faith and holiness, is a wretched miscalculation of the comparative value of things. To bestow our attention on objects in an inverse proportion to their importance, is surely no proof that our learning has improved our judgment.

That deep thinker and acute reasoner, Dr. Barrow, has remarked that 'it is a peculiar excellency

of human nature, and which distinguishes man from the inferior creatures more than bare reason itself, that he can reflect upon all that is done within him, can discern the tendencies of his soul, and is acquainted with his own purposes.'

This distinguishing faculty of self-inspection would not have been conferred on man, if it had not been intended that it should be in habitual operation. It is surely, as we before observed, as much a common law of prudence, to look well to our spiritual as to our worldly possessions. We have appetites to control, imaginations to restrain, tempers to regulate, passions to subdue; and how can this internal work be effected, how can our thoughts be kept within due bounds, how can a proper bias be given to the affections, how can 'the little state of man' be preserved from continual insurrection, how can this restraining power be maintained, if this capacity of discerning, if this faculty of inspecting be not kept in regular exercise? Without constant discipline, imagination will become an outlaw, conscience an attainted rebel.

This inward eye, this power of introversion, is given us for a continual watch upon the soul. On an unremitted vigilance over its interior motions, those fruitful seeds of action, those prolific principles of vice and virtue, will depend both the formation and the growth of our moral and religious character. A superficial glance is not enough for a thing so deep, an unsteady view will not suffice for a thing so wavering, nor a casual look for a thing so deceitful as the human heart. A partial inspection on any one side, will not be enough for an object which must be observed under a variety of aspects,

because it is always shifting its positions, always changing its appearances.

We should examine not only our conduct but our opinions; not only our faults but our prejudices; not only our propensities but our judgments. Our actions themselves will be obvious enough; it is our intentions which require the scrutiny. These we should follow up to their remotest springs, scrutinize to their deepest recesses, trace through their most perplexing windings. And lest we should, in our pursuit, wander in uncertainty and blindness, let us make use of that guiding clue which the Almighty has furnished by his word and by his spirit, for conducting us through the intricacies of this labyrinth. 'What I know not, teach thou me,' should be our constant petition in all our researches.

Did we turn our thoughts inward, it would abate much of the self-complacency with which we swallow the flattery of others. Flattery hurts not him who flatters not himself. If we examined our motives keenly, we should frequently blush at the praises our actions receive. Let us then conscientiously inquire not only what we do, but whence and why we do it, from what motive and to what end.

Self-inspection is the only means to preserve us from self-conceit. We could not surely so very extravagantly value a being whom we ourselves should not only see, but feel to be so full of faults. Self-acquaintance will give us a far more deep and intimate knowledge of our own errors than we can possibly have, with all the inquisitiveness of an idle curiosity, of the errors of others. We are eager enough to blame them without knowing their mo-

tives. We are no less eager to vindicate ourselves, though we cannot be entirely ignorant of our own. Thus two virtues will be acquired by the same act, humility and candour; an impartial review of our own infirmities, being the likeliest way to make us tender and compassionate to those of others.

Nor shall we be liable so to overrate our own judgment when we perceive that it often forms such false estimates, is so captivated with trifles, so elated with petty successes, so dejected with little disappointments. When we hear others commend our charity which we know is so cold; when others extol our piety which we feel to be so dead; when they applaud the energies of our faith, which we must know to be so faint and feeble, we cannot possibly be so intoxicated with the applauses which never would have been given, had the applauder known us as we know, or ought to know ourselves. If we contradict him, it may be only to draw on ourselves the imputation of a fresh virtue, humility, which perhaps we as little deserve to have ascribed to us as that which we have been renouncing. If we keep a sharp look out, we should not be proud of praises which cannot apply to us, but should rather grieve at the involuntary fraud of imposing on others, by tacitly accepting a character to which we have so little real pretension. To be delighted at finding that people think so much better of us than we are conscious of deserving, is in effect to rejoice in the success of our own deceit.

We shall also become more patient, more forbearing and forgiving, shall better endure the harsh judgment of others respecting us, when we perceive that their opinion of us nearly coincides with our own real though unacknowledged sentiments. There

is much less injury incurred by others thinking too ill of us, than in our thinking too well of ourselves.

It is evident then, that to live at random, is not the life of a rational, much less of an immortal, least of all, of an accountable being. To pray occasionally, without a deliberate course of prayer; to be generous without proportioning our means to our expenditure; to be liberal without a plan, and charitable without a principle; to let the mind float on the current of public opinion; lie at the mercy of events, for the probable occurrence of which we have made no provision; to be every hour liable to death without any habitual preparation for it; to carry within us a principle which we believe will exist through all the countless ages of eternity, and yet to make little inquiry whether that eternity is likely to be happy or miserable—all this is an inconsiderateness which, if adopted in the ordinary concerns of life, would bid fair to ruin a man's reputation for common sense: yet of this infatuation he who lives without self-examination is absolutely guilty.

Nothing more plainly shows us what weak vacillating creatures we are, than the difficulty we find in fixing ourselves down to the very self-scrutiny we had deliberately resolved on. Like the worthless Roman emperor we retire to our closet under the appearance of serious occupation, but might now and then be surprised, if not in catching flies, yet in pursuits nearly as contemptible. Some trifle which we should be ashamed to dwell upon at any time, intrudes itself on the moments dedicated to serious thought; recollection is interrupted; the whole chain of reflection broken, so that the scattered links cannot again be united. And so inconsistent are we that we are sometimes not sorry to have a plausible

pretence for interrupting the very employment in which we had just before made it a duty to engage. For want of this home acquaintance, we remain in utter ignorance of our inability to meet even the ordinary trials of life with cheerfulness; indeed by this neglect we confirm that inability. Nursed in the lap of luxury, we have an indefinite notion that we have but a loose hold on the things of this world, and of the world itself.—But let some accident take away, not the world, but some trifle on which we thought we set no value while we possessed it, and we find to our astonishment that we hold, not the world only, but even this trivial possession with a pretty tight grasp. Such detections of our self-ignorance, if they do not serve to wean, ought at least to humble us.

There is a spurious sort of self-examination which does not serve to enlighten but to blind. A person who has left off some notorious vice, who has softened some shades of a glaring sin or substituted some outward forms in the place of open irreligion, looks on this change of character with pleasure. He compares himself with what he was, and views the alteration with self-complacency. He deceives himself by taking his standard from his former conduct, or from the character of still worse men, instead of taking it from the unerring rule of Scripture. He looks rather at the discredit than the sinfulness of his former life, and being more ashamed of what is disreputable than grieved at what is vicious, he is, in this state of shallow reformation, more in danger in proportion as he is more in credit. He is not aware that it is not having a fault or two less that will carry him to heaven, while his heart is still glued to the world and estranged from God.

If we ever look into our hearts at all, we are naturally most inclined to it when we think we have been acting right. Here inspection gratifies self-love. We have no great difficulty in directing our attention to an object, when that object presents us with pleasing images. But it is a painful effort to compel the mind to turn in on itself, when the view only presents subjects for regret and remorse. This painful duty however must be performed, and will be more salutary in proportion as it is less pleasant.—Let us establish it into a habit to ruminate on our faults. With the recollection of our virtues we need not feed our vanity. They will, if that vanity does not obliterate them, be recorded elsewhere.

We are also most disposed to look at those parts of our character which will best bear it, and which consequently least need it: at those parts which afford most self-gratulation. If a covetous man, for instance, examines himself, instead of turning his attention to the peccant part, he applies the probe where he knows it will not go very deep; he turns from his avarice to that sobriety of which his very avarice is perhaps the source. Another, who is the slave of passion, fondly rests upon some act of generosity, which he considers as a fair commutation for some favourite vice, that would cost him more to renounce than he is willing to part with. We are all too much disposed to dwell on that smiling side of the prospect which pleases and deceives us, and to shut our eyes upon that part which we do not choose to see, because we are resolved not to quit. Self-love always holds a screen between the superficial self-examiner and his faults. The nominal Christian wraps himself up in forms which he makes

himself believe are Religion. He exults in what he does, overlooks what he ought to do, nor ever suspects that what is done at all can be done amiss.

As we are so indolent that we seldom examine a truth on more than one side, so we generally take care that it shall be that side which shall confirm some old prejudices. While we will not take pains to correct those prejudices and to rectify our judgment, lest it should oblige us to discard a favourite opinion, we are yet as eager to judge, and as forward to decide, as if we were fully possessed of the grounds on which a sound judgment may be made, and a just decision formed.

We should watch ourselves whether we observe a simple rule of truth and justice, as well in our conversation, as in our ordinary transactions; whether we are exact in our measures of commendation and censure; whether we do not bestow extravagant praise where simple approbation alone is due; whether we do not withhold commendation, where, if given, it would support modesty and encourage merit; whether what deserves only a slight censure as imprudent, we do not reprobate as immoral; whether we do not sometimes affect to overrate ordinary merit, in the hope of securing to ourselves the reputation of candour, that we may on other occasions, with less suspicion, depreciate established excellence. We extol the first because we fancy that it can come into no competition with us, and we derogate from the last because it obviously eclipses us.

Let us ask ourselves if we are conscientiously upright in our estimation of benefits; whether when we have a favour to ask, we do not depreciate its

value, when we have one to grant we do not aggravate it.

It is only by scrutinizing the heart that we can know it. It is only by knowing the heart that we can reform the life. Any careless observer indeed, when his watch goes wrong, may see that it does so, by casting an eye on the dial plate; but it is only the artist who takes it to pieces and examines every spring and every wheel separately, and who, by ascertaining the precise causes of the irregularity, can set the machine right, and restore the obstructed movements.

The illusions of intellectual vision would be materially corrected by a close habit of cultivating an acquaintance with our hearts. We fill much too large a space in our own imaginations; we fancy we take up more room in the world than Providence assigns to an individual who has to divide his allotment with so many millions, who are all of equal importance in their own eyes; and who, like us, are elbowing others to make room for themselves. Just as in the natural world, where every particle of matter would stretch itself, and move out of its place, if it were not kept in order by surrounding particles; the pressure of other parts reduces this to remain in a confinement from which it would escape, if it were not thus pressed and acted upon on all sides. The conscientious practice we have been recommending, would greatly assist in reducing us to our proper dimensions, and in limiting us to our proper place. We should be astonished if we could see our real diminutiveness, and the speck we actually occupy. When shall we learn from our own feelings of how much consequence every man is to himself?

Nor must the examination be occasional, but regular. Let us not run into long arrears, but settle our accounts frequently. Little articles will run up to a large amount, if they are not cleared off. Even our *innocent* days, as we may choose to call them, will not have passed without furnishing their contingent—our deadness in devotion—our eagerness for human applause—our care toconceal our faults rather than to correct them—our negligent performance of some relative duty—our imprudence in conversation, especially at table—our inconsideration—our driving to the very edge of permitted indulgencies, —let us keep these—let us keep all our numerous items in small sums. Let us examine them while the particulars are fresh in our memory; otherwise, however we may flatter ourselves that lesser evils will be swallowed up by the greater, we may find when we come to settle the grand account, that they will not be the less remembered for not having been recorded.

And let it be one subject of our frequent inquiry, whether since we last scrutinized our hearts, our secular affairs, or our eternal concerns have had the predominance there. We do not mean which of them has occupied most of our time, the larger portion of which must, necessarily, to the generality, be absorbed in the cares of the present life; but on which our affections have been most bent; and especially how we have conducted ourselves when there has arisen a competition between the interests of both.

That general burst of sins which so frequently rushes in on the consciences of the dying, would be much moderated by previous habitual self-examination. It will not do to repent in the lump. The

sorrow must be as circumstantial as the sin. Indefinite repentance is no repentance. And it is one grand use of self-inquiry, to remind us, that all unforsaken sins are unrepented sins.

To a Christian there is this substantial comfort attending a minute self-inspection, that when he finds fewer sins to be noted, and more victories over temptation obtained, he has a solid evidence of his advancement, which well repays his trouble.

The faithful searcher into his own heart, that 'chamber of imagery,' feels himself in the situation of the prophet,* who being conducted in vision from one idol to another, the spirit at sight of each, repeatedly exclaims, 'here is another abomination!' The prophet being commanded to dig deeper, the further he penetrated the more evils he found, while the spirit continued to cry out, 'I will show thee yet more abomination.'

Self-examination by detecting self-love, self-denial by weakening its power, self-government by reducing its despotism, turns the temper of the soul from its natural bias, controls the disorderly appetite, and, under the influence of Divine Grace, in a good measure restores to the man that dominion over himself, which God at first gave him over the inferior creatures. Desires, passions, and appetites are brought to move somewhat more in their appointed order; subjects not tyrants. What the stoics vainly pretended to, Christianity effects. It restores man to a dominion over his own will, and in a good measure enthrones him in that empire which he had forfeited by sin.

He now begins to survey his interior, the awful world within; not indeed with self-complacency, but

* Ezekiel.

with the control of a sovereign; he still finds too much rebellion to indulge security, he therefore continues his inspection with vigilance, but without perturbation. He continues to experience a remainder of insubordination and disorder, but this rather solicits to a stricter government than drives him to relax his discipline.

This self-inspection somewhat resembles the correction of a literary performance. After many and careful revisals, though some grosser faults may be done away; though the errors are neither quite so numerous, nor so glaring as at first, yet the critic perpetually perceives faults which he had not perceived before; negligences appear which he had overlooked, and even defects start up which had passed on him for beauties. He finds much to amend, and even to expunge, in what he had before admired. When by rigorous castigation the most acknowledged faults are corrected, his critical acumen, improved by exercise, and a more habitual acquaintance with his subjects, still detect and will for ever detect, new imperfections. But he neither throws aside his work, nor remits his criticism, which if it do not make the work perfect, will at least make the author humble. Conscious that if it is not quite so bad as it was, it is still at an immeasurable distance from the required excellence.

Is it not astonishing that we should go on repeating periodically, 'Try me, O God,' while we are yet neglecting to try ourselves? Is there not something more like defiance than devotion to invite the inspection of Omniscience to that heart which we ourselves neglect to inspect? How can a Christian solemnly cry out to the Almighty, 'seek the ground of my heart, prove me and examine my thoughts,

and see if there be any ways of wickedness in me,' while he himself neglects to 'examine his heart,' is afraid of 'proving his thoughts,' and dreads to inquire if there 'be any way of wickedness' in himself, knowing that the inquiry ought to lead to the expulsion.

In our self-inquisition let us fortify our virtue by a rigorous exactness in calling things by their proper names. Self-love is particularly ingenious in inventing disguises of this kind. Let us lay them open, strip them bare, face them, and give them as little quarter as if they were the faults of another. Let us not call wounded pride delicacy. Self-love is made up of soft and sickly sensibilities. Not that sensibility which melts at the sorrows of others, but that which cannot endure the least suffering itself. It is alive in every pore where self is concerned. A touch is a wound. It is careless in inflicting pain, but exquisitely awake in feeling it. It defends itself before it is attacked, revenges affronts before they are offered, and resents as an insult the very suspicion of an imperfection.

In order then to unmask our hearts, let us not be contented to examine our vices, let us examine our virtues also, 'those smaller faults.' Let us scrutinize to the bottom those qualities and actions which have more particularly obtained public estimation. Let us inquire if they were genuine in the principle, simple in the intention, honest in the prosecution, Let us ask ourselves if in some admired instances our generosity had no tincture of vanity, our charity no taint of ostentation? Whether, when we did such a right action which brought us credit, we should have persisted in doing it, had we foreseen that it would incur censure. Do we never deceive

ourselves by mistaking a constitutional indifference of temper for christian moderation? Do we never construe our love of ease into deadness of the world? Our animal activity into christian zeal? Do we never mistake our obstinacy for firmness, our pride for fortitude, our selfishness for feeling, our love of controversy for the love of God, our indolence of temper for superiority to human applause? When we have stripped our good qualities bare; when we have made all due deductions for natural temper, easiness of disposition, self-interest; desire of admiration; of every extrinsic appendage, every illegitimate motive, let us fairly cast up the account, and we shall be mortified to see how little there will remain. Pride may impose itself upon us, even in the shape of repentance. The humble Christian is grieved at his faults, the proud man is angry at them. He is indignant when he discovers he has done wrong, not so much because his sin offends God, as because it has let him see that he is not quite so good as he had tried to make himself believe.

It is more necessary to excite us to the humbling of our pride, than to the performance of certain good actions; the former is more difficult as it is less pleasant. That very pride will of itself stimulate to the performance of many things that are laudable. These performances will reproduce pride, as they were produced by it; whereas humility has no outward stimulus. Divine grace alone produces it. It is so far from being actuated by the love of fame, that it is not humility, till it has laid the desire of fame in the dust.

If an actual virtue consists, as we have frequently had occasion to observe, in the dominion over

the contrary vice, humility is the conquest over pride, charity over selfishness; not only a victory over the natural temper, but a substitution of the opposite quality. This proves that all virtue is founded in self-denial, self-denial in self-knowledge, and self-knowledge in self-examination. Pride so insinuates itself in all we do, and say, and think, that our apparent humility has not seldom its origin in pride. That very impatience which we feel at the perception of our faults is produced by the astonishment at finding that we are not perfect. This sense of our sins should make us humble but not desperate. It should teach us to distrust every thing in ourselves, and to hope for every thing from God. The more we lay open the wounds which sin has made, the more earnestly shall we seek the remedy which Christianity has provided.

But instead of seeking for self-knowledge, we are glancing about us for grounds of self-exaltation! We almost resemble the pharisee, who with so much self-complacency delivered in the catalogue of his own virtues and other men's sins, and, like the Tartars, who think they possess the qualities of those they murder, fancied that the sins of which he accused the publican would swell the amount of his own good deeds. Like him we take a few items from memory, and a few more from imagination. Instead of pulling down the edifice which pride has raised, we are looking round on our good works for buttresses to prop it up. We excuse ourselves from the imputation of many faults by alleging that they are common, and by no means peculiar to ourselves. This is one of the weakest of our deceits. Faults are not less personally ours because others commit them. There is divisibility in sin as well as in

matter. Is it any diminution of our error that others are guilty of the same?

Self-love being a very industrious principle, has generally two concerns in hand at the same time. It is as busy in concealing our own defects as in detecting those of others, especially those of the wise and good. We might indeed direct its activity in the latter instance to our own advantage, for if the faults of good men are injurious to themselves, they might be rendered profitable to us, if we were careful to convert them to their true use. But instead of turning them into a means of promoting our own watchfulness, we employ them mischievously in two ways. We lessen our respect for pious characters when we see the infirmities which are blended with their fine qualities, and we turn their failings into a justification of our own, which are not like theirs, overshadowed with virtues. To admire the excellences of others without imitating them is fruitless admiration; to condemn their errors without avoiding them is unprofitable censoriousness.

When we are compelled by our conscience to acknowledge and regret any fault we have recently committed, this fault so presses upon our recollection, that we seem to forget that we have any other. This single error fills our mind, and we look at it as through a telescope, which, while it shows an object, confines the sight to that one object exclusively. Others indeed are more effectually shut out, than if we were not examining this. Thus while the object in question is magnified, the others are as if they did not exist.

It seems to be established into a kind of system not to profit by any thing without us, and not to cul-

tivate an acquaintance with any thing within us. Though we are perpetually remarking on the defects of others, yet when does the remark lead us to study and to root out the same defects in our own hearts? We are almost every day hearing of the death of others, but does it induce us to reflect on death as a thing in which we have an individual concern? We consider the death of a friend as a loss, but seldom apply it as a warning. The death of others we lament, the faults of others we censure, but how seldom do we make use of the one for our own amendment, or of the other for our own preparation?*

It is the fashion of the times to try experiments in the arts, in agriculture, in philosophy. In every science the diligent professor is always afraid there may be some secret which he has not yet attained, some occult principle which would reward the labour of discovery, something even which the assiduous and intelligent have actually found out, but which has hitherto eluded *his* pursuit. And shall the Christian stop short in his scrutiny, shall he not examine and inquire till he lays hold on the very heart and core of religion?

Why should experimental philosophy be the prevailing study, and experimental religion be branded as the badge of enthusiasm, the cant of a hollow profession? Shall we never labour to establish the distinction between appearance and reality, between studying religion critically and embracing it practically, between having our conduct creditable and our hearts sanctified? Shall we not aspire to do the best

* For this hint, and a few others on the same subject, the author is indebted to that excellent christian moralist, M. Nicole.

things from the highest motives, and elevate our aims with our attainments? Why should we remain in the vestibule when the sanctuary is open? Why should we be contented to dwell in the outer courts when we are invited to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus?

Natural reason is not likely to furnish arguments sufficiently cogent, nor motives sufficiently powerful to drive us to a close self-inspection. Our corruptions foster this ignorance. To this they owe their undisputed possession of our hearts. No principle short of Christianity is strong enough to impel us to a study so disagreeable as that of our faults. Of Christianity, humility is the prime grace, and this grace can never take root and flourish in a heart that lives in ignorance of itself. If we do not know the greatness and extent of our sins, if we do not know the imperfections of our virtues, the fallability of our best resolutions, the infirmity of our purest purposes, we cannot be humble; if we are not humble, we cannot be Christians.

But it may be asked, is there to be no end to this vigilance? Is there no assigned period when this self-denial may become unnecessary? No given point when we may be emancipated from this vexatious self-inspection? Is the matured Christian to be a slave to the same drudgery as the novice? The true answer is—we may cease to watch when our spiritual enemy ceases to assail. We may be off our guard when there is no longer any temptation without. We may cease our self-denial when there is no more corruption within. We may give the reins to our imagination when we are sure its tendencies will be towards heaven. We may dismiss repentance when sin is abolished. We may indulge selfishness

when we can do it without danger to our souls. We may neglect prayer when we no longer need the favour of God. We may cease to praise him when he ceases to be gracious to us.—To discontinue our vigilance at any period short of this, will be to defeat all the virtues we have practised on earth, to put to hazard all our hopes of happiness in heaven.

CHAP. XIII.

SELF-LOVE.

'THE idol Self,' says an excellent old divine,* 'has made more desolation among men than ever was made in those places where idols were served by human sacrifices. It has preyed more fiercely on human lives, than Moloch or the Minotaur.'

To worship images is a more obvious, but it is scarcely a more degrading idolatry, than to set up self in opposition to God. To devote ourselves to this service is as perfect slavery as the service of God is perfect freedom. If we cannot imitate the sacrifice of Christ in his death, we are called upon to imitate the sacrifice of himself in his will. Even the Son of God declared 'I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.' This was his grand lesson, this was his distinguishing character.

Self-will is the ever flowing fountain of all the evil tempers which deform our hearts, of all the boiling passions which inflame and disorder society;

* Howe.

the root of bitterness on which all its corrupt fruits grow. We set up our own understanding against the wisdom of God, and our own passions against the will of God. If we could ascertain the precise period when sensuality ceased to govern in the animal part of our nature, and pride in the intellectual, that period would form the most memorable era of the christian life; from that moment he begins a new date of liberty and happiness; from that stage he sets out on a new career of peace, liberty, and virtue.

Self-love is a Proteus of all shapes, shades, and complexions. It has the power of dilatation and contraction as best serves the occasion. There is no crevice so small through which its subtle essence cannot force its way, no space so ample that it cannot stretch itself to fill.—It is of all degrees of refinement, so coarse and hungry as to gorge itself with the grossest adulation; so fastidious as to require a homage as refined as itself; so artful as to elude the detection of ordinary observers; so specious as to escape the observation of the very heart in which it reigns paramount: yet, though so extravagant in its appetites, it can adopt a moderation which imposes, a delicacy which veils its deformity, an artificial character which keeps its real one out of sight.

We are apt to speak of self-love as if it were only a symptom, whereas it is the distemper itself; a malignant distemper which has possession of the moral constitution, of which malady every part of the system participates. In direct opposition to the effect produced by the touch of the fabled king, which converted the basest materials into gold, this corrupting principle pollutes, by coming in contact with it, whatever is in itself great and noble.

Self-love is the centre of the unrenewed heart. This stirring principle, as has been observed, serves indeed

The virtuous mind to wake;

but it disturbs it from its slumber to ends and purposes directly opposite to those assigned to it by our incomparable bard.* Self-love is by no means 'the small pebble which stirs the peaceful lake.' It is rather the pent-up wind within, which causes the earthquake; it is the tempest which agitates the sleeping ocean. Had the image been as just as its clothing is beautiful; or rather had *Mr. Pope* been as sound a theologian as he was an exquisite poet, the allusion in his hands might have conveyed a sounder meaning without losing a particle of its elegance. This might have been effected by only substituting the effect for the cause; that is, by making benevolence the principle instead of the consequence, and by discarding self-love from its central situation in the construction of the metaphor.

But by arraying a beggarly idea in princely robes, he knew that his own splendid powers could at any time transform meanness into majesty, and deformity into beauty.

After all however, *le vrai est le seul beau.* Had he not blindly adopted the misleading system of the noble sceptic, 'his guide, philosopher, and friend,' he might have transferred the shining attributes of the base-born thing which he has dressed out with so many graces, to the legitimate claimant—benevolence; of which self-love is so far from being, as he represents, the moving spring, that they are both

* Essay on Man, 1. 362.

working in a course of incessant counteraction, the spirit striving against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit.

To christian benevolence all the happy effects attributed to self-love might have been fairly traced. It was only to dislodge the idol and make the love of God the centre, and the poet's delightful numbers might have conveyed truths worthy of so perfect a vehicle. 'This centre moved,' does indeed extend its pervading influence in the very manner ascribed to the opposite principle; does indeed spread from its throne in the individual breast, to all those successive circles, 'wide and more wide,' of which the poet makes self-love the first mover.*

The apostle James appears to have been of a different opinion from the ethic bard; he speaks as if he suspected that the pebble stirred the lake a little too roughly. He traces this mischievous principle from its birth to the largest extent of its malign influence.—The question, 'whence come wars and fightings among you,' he answers by another question;—'Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?'

* Self-love thus pushed to social, to divine,
Gives thee to make thy neighbour's blessing thine:
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle straight succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race.

The author hopes to be forgiven for these remarks: she has hazarded them for the sake of her more youthful readers.—She has not forgotten the time when, in the admiration of youthful enthusiasm, she never suspected that the principle of these finished verses was less excellent than the poetry.

The same pervading spirit which creates hostility between nations, creates animosity among neighbours, and discord in families. It is the same principle which, having in the beginning made 'Cain the first male child,' a murderer in his father's house, has been ever since in perpetual operation; has been transmitted in one unbroken line of succession, through that long chain of crimes of which history is composed, to the present triumphant spoiler of Europe.—In cultivated societies, laws repress, by punishing, the overt act in private individuals, but no one thing but the christian religion has ever been devised to cleanse the spring.

'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?' This proposition, this interrogation, we read with complacency, and both the aphorism and the question being a portion of scripture, we think it would not be decent to controvert it. We read it however with a secret reservation, that it is only the heart of all the rest of the world that is meant, and we rarely make the application which the scripture intended. Each hopes that there is *one* heart which may escape the charge, and he makes the single exception in favour of his own. But if the exception which every one makes were true, there would not be a deceitful or wicked heart in the world.

As a theory we are ready enough to admire self-knowledge, yet when the practice comes in question we are as blindfold as if our happiness depended on our ignorance. To lay hold on a religious truth, and to maintain our hold, is no easy matter. Our understandings are not more ready to receive than our affections to lose it. We like to have an intellectual knowledge of divine things, but to cultivate

a spiritual acquaintance with them cannot be effected at so cheap a rate. We can even more readily force ourselves to believe that which has no affinity with our understanding, than we can bring ourselves to choose that which has no interest in our will, no correspondence with our passions. One of the first duties of a Christian is, to endeavour to conquer this antipathy to the self-denying doctrines against which the human heart so sturdily holds out. The learned take incredible pains for the acquisition of knowledge. The philosopher cheerfully consumes the midnight oil in his laborious pursuits; he willingly sacrifices food and rest to conquer a difficulty in science. Here the labour is pleasant, the fatigue is grateful, the very difficulty is not without its charms. Why do we feel so differently in our religious pursuits? Because in the most operose human studies, there is no contradiction of self, there is no opposition to the will, there is no combat of the affections. If the passions are at all implicated, if self-love is at all concerned, it is rather in the way of gratification than of opposition.

There is such a thing as a mechanical christianity. There are good imitations of religion, so well executed and so resembling, as not only to deceive the spectator, but the artist. Self-love in its various artifices to deceive us to our ruin, sometimes makes use of a means, which, if properly used, is one of the most beneficial that can be devised to preserve us from its influence—the perusal of pious books.

But these very books in the hands of the ignorant, the indolent, and the self-satisfied, produce an effect directly contrary to that which they were intended to produce, and which they actually do produce on minds prepared for the perusal. They inflate where

they were intended to humble. As some hypochondriacs, who amuse their melancholy hours with consulting indiscriminately every medical book which falls in their way, fancy they find their own case in every page, their own ailment in the ailment of every patient, till they believe they actually feel every pain of which they read, though the work treats of cases diametrically opposite to their own:—so the religious valetudinarian, as unreasonably elated as the others are depressed, reads books descriptive of a highly religious state, with the same unhappy self-application. He feels his spiritual pulse by a watch that has no movements in common with it, yet he fancies that they go exactly alike. He dwells with delight on symptoms, not one of which belongs to him, and flatters himself with their supposed agreement. He observes in those books what are the signs of grace, and he observes them with complete self-application; he traces what are the evidences of being in God's favour, and those evidences he finds in himself.

Self-ignorance appropriates truths faithfully stated but wholly inapplicable. The presumption of the novice arrogates to itself the experience of the advanced Christian. He is persuaded that it is his own case, and seizes on the consolations which belong only to the most elevated piety. Self-knowledge would correct the judgment. It would teach us to use the pattern held out as an original to copy, instead of leading us to fancy that we are already wrought into the assimilation. It would teach us when we read the history of an established Christian, to labour after a conformity to it, instead of mistaking it for the delineation of our own character.

Human prudence, daily experience, self-love, all teach us to distrust others, but all motives combined do not teach us to distrust ourselves; we confide unreservedly in our own heart, though as a guide it misleads, as a counsellor it betrays. It is both party and judge. As the one, it blinds through ignorance, as the other, it acquits through partiality.

Though we value ourselves upon our discretion in not confiding too implicitly in others, yet it would be difficult to find any friend, any neighbour, or even any enemy who has deceived us so often as we have deceived ourselves. If an acquaintance betray us, we take warning, are on the watch, and are careful not to trust him again. But however frequently the bosom traitor deceive and mislead, no such determined stand is made against his treachery: we lie as open to his next assault as if he had never betrayed us. We do not profit by the remembrance of the past delusion to guard against the future.

Yet if another deceive us, it is only in matters respecting this world; but we deceive ourselves in things of eternal moment. The treachery of others can only affect our fortune or our fame, or at worst our peace; but the internal traitor may mislead us to our everlasting destruction. We are too much disposed to suspect others who probably have neither the inclination nor the power to injure us, but we seldom suspect our own heart though it possesses and employs both. We ought however fairly to distinguish between the simple vanity and the hypocrisy of self-love. Those who content themselves with talking as if the praise of virtue implied the practice, and who expect to be thought good, because they commend goodness, only propagate the deceit which has misled themselves, whereas hy-

pocrisy does not even believe herself. She has deeper motives; she has designs to answer, competitions to promote, projects to effect. But mere vanity can subsist on the thin air of the admiration she solicits, without intending to get any thing by it. She is gratuitous in her loquacity; for she is ready to display her own merit to those who have nothing to give in return, whose applause brings no profit, and whose censure no disgrace.

It is not strange that we should judge of things not according to truth, but according to the opinion of others in cases foreign to ourselves; cases on which we have no correct means of determining; but we do it in things which relate immediately to ourselves, thus making not truth but the opinion of others our standard in points which others cannot know, and of which we ought not to be ignorant. We are as fond of the applauses even of the upper gallery as the dramatic poet. Like him we affect to despise the mob considered as individual judges, yet as a mass, we covet their applause. Like him we feel strengthened by the number of voices in our favour, and are less anxious about the goodness of the work, than the loudness of the acclamation. Success is merit in the eye of both.

But even though we may put more refinement into our self-love, it is self-love still. No subtlety of reasoning, no elegance of taste, though it may disguise the radical principle, can destroy it. We are still too much in love with flattery, even though we may profess to despise that praise which depends on the acclamations of the vulgar. But if we are over anxious for the admiration of the better born and the better bred, this by no means proves that we are not vain; it only proves that our vanity has a better

taste. Our appetite is not coarse enough perhaps to relish that popularity which ordinary ambition covets, but do we never feed in secret on the applauses of more distinguished judges? Is not their having extolled *our* merit a confirmation of our discernment, and the chief ground of our high opinion of *theirs?*

But if any circumstance arise to induce them to change the too favourable opinion which they had formed of us, though their general character remain unimpeachable, and their general conduct as meritorious as when we most admired them, do we not begin to judge them unfavourably? Do we not begin to question their claim to that discernment which we had ascribed to them, to suspect the soundness of their judgment which we had so loudly commended? It is well if we do not entertain some doubt of the rectitude of their principles, as we probably do of the reality of their friendship. We do not candidly allow for the effect which prejudice, which misrepresentation, which party may produce even on an upright mind. Still less does it enter into our calculation that we may actually have deserved their disapprobation, that something in our conduct may have incurred the change in theirs.

It is no low attainment to detect this lurking injustice in our hearts, to strive against it, to pray against it, and especially to conquer it. We may reckon that we have acquired a sound principle of integrity when prejudice no longer blinds our judgment, nor resentment biasses our justice; when we do not make our opinion of another depend on the opinion which we conceive he entertains of us. We must keep a just measure, and hold an even balance in judging of ourselves as well as of others. We

must have no false estimate which shall incline to condemnation without, or to partiality within. The examining principle must be kept sound, or our determination will not be exact. It must be at once a testimony of our rectitude, and an incentive to it.

In order to improve this principle, we should make it a test of our sincerity to search out and to commend the good qualities of those who do not like us. But this must be done without affectation, and without insincerity. We must practise no false candour. If we are not on our guard we may be laying out for the praise of generosity, while we are only exercising a simple act of justice. These refinements of self-love are the dangers only of spirits of the higher order, but to such they are dangers.

The ingenuity of self-deceit is inexhaustible. If people extol us, we feel our good opinion of ourselves confirmed. If they dislike us, we do not think the worse of ourselves, but of them; it is not *we* who want merit but *they* who want penetration. If we cannot refuse them discernment, we persuade ourselves that they are not so much insensible to our worth as envious of it. There is no shift, stratagem, or device which we do not employ to make us stand well with ourselves.

We are too apt to calculate our own character unfairly in two ways; by referring to some one signal act of generosity, as if such acts were the common habit of our lives, and by treating our habitual faults, not as common habits, but occasional failures. There is scarcely any fault in another which offends us more than vanity, though perhaps there is none that really injures us so little. We have no patience that another should be as full of self-love as we allow ourselves to be; so full of himself as to have little

leisure to attend to us. We are particularly quick sighted to the smallest of his imperfections which interferes with our self-esteem, while we are lenient to his more grave offences, which by not coming in contact with our vanity, do not shock our self-love.

Is it not strange that though we love ourselves so much better than we love any other person, yet there is hardly one, however little we value him, that we had not rather be alone with, that we had not rather converse with, that we had not rather come to close quarters with, than ourselves? Scarcely one whose private history, whose thoughts, feelings, actions, and motives we had not rather pry into than our own. Do we not use every art and contrivance to avoid getting at the truth of our own character? Do we not endeavour to keep ourselves ignorant of what every one else knows respecting our faults, and do we not account that man our enemy, who takes on himself the best office of a friend, that of opening to us our real state and condition?

The little satisfaction people find when they faithfully look within, makes them fly more eagerly to things without. Early practice and long habit might conquer the repugnance to look at home, and the fondness for looking abroad. Familiarity often makes us pleased with the society which, while strangers, we dreaded. Intimacy with ourselves might produce a similar effect.

We might perhaps collect a tolerably just knowledge of our own character, could we ascertain the *real* opinion of others respecting us; but that opinion being, except in a moment of resentment, carefully kept from us by our own precautions, profits us nothing. We do not choose to know their secret sentiments, because we do not choose to be cured of

our error; because we 'love darkness rather than light;' because we conceive that in parting with our vanity, we should part with the only comfort we have, that of being ignorant of our own faults.

Self-knowledge would materially contribute to our happiness, by curing us of that self-sufficiency which is continually exposing us to mortifications. The hourly rubs and vexations which pride undergoes, is far more than an equivalent for the short intoxication of pleasure which it snatches.

The enemy within is always in a confederacy with the enemy without, whether that enemy be the world or the devil. The domestic foe accommodates itself to their allurements, flatters our weaknesses, throws a veil over our vices, tarnishes our good deeds, gilds our bad ones, hoodwinks our judgment, and works hard to conceal our internal springs of action.

Self-love has the talent of imitating whatever the world admires, even though it should happen to be the christian virtues. It leads us from our regard to reputation to avoid all vices, not only which would bring punishment but discredit by the commission. It can even assume the zeal and copy the activity of christian charity. It communicates to our conduct those proprieties and graces, manifested in the conduct of those who are actuated by a sounder motive. The difference lies in the ends proposed. The object of the one is to please God, of the other to obtain the praise of man.

Self-love judging of the feelings of others by its own, is aware that nothing excites so much odium as its own character would do, if nakedly exhibited. We feel, by our own disgust at its exhibition in others, how much disgust we ourselves should excite did we not invest it with the soft garb of gentle

manners and a polished address. When therefore we would not condescend 'to take the lowest place, to think others better than ourselves, to be courteous and pitiful,' on the true scripture ground, politeness steps in as the accredited substitute of humility, and the counterfeit brilliant is willingly worn by those who will not be at the expense of the jewel.

There is a certain elegance of mind, which will often restrain a well-bred man from sordid pleasures and gross voluptuousness. He will be led by his good taste perhaps not only to abhor the excesses of vice, but to admire the theory of virtue. But it is only the *crapule* of vice which he will abhor. Exquisite gratifications, sober luxury, incessant but not unmeasured enjoyment, form the principle of his plan of life, and if he observe a temperance in his pleasures, it is only because excess would take off the edge, destroy the zest, and abridge the gratification. By resisting gross vice he flatters himself that he is a temperate man, and that he has made all the sacrifices which self-denial imposes. Inwardly satisfied, he compares himself with those who have sunk into coarser indulgences, enjoys his own superiority in health, credit and unimpaired faculties, and triumphs in the dignity of his own character.

There is, if the expression may be allowed, a sort of religious self-deceit, an affectation of humility which is in reality full of self, which is entirely occupied with self, which resolves all importance into what concerns self, which only looks at things as they refer to self. This religious vanity operates in two ways:—We not only fly out at the imputation of the smallest individual fault, while at the same time we affect to charge ourselves with more cor-

ruption than is attributed to us; but on the other hand, while we are lamenting our general want of all goodness, we fight for every particle that is disputed. The one quality that is in question always happens to be the very one to which we *must* lay claim, however deficient in others.—Thus, while renouncing the pretensions to every virtue, 'we depreciate ourselves into all.' We had rather talk even of our faults than not occupy the fore-ground of the canvass.

Humility does not consist in telling our faults, but in bearing to be told of them; in hearing them patiently and even thankfully; in correcting ourselves when told; in not hating those who tell us of them. If we were little in our own eyes, and felt our real insignificance, we should avoid false humility as much as mere obvious vanity; but we seldom dwell on our faults except in a general way, and rarely on those of which we are really guilty. We do it in the hope of being contradicted, and thus of being confirmed in the secret good opinion we entertain of ourselves. It is not enough that we inveigh against ourselves, we must in a manner forget ourselves. This oblivion of self from a pure principle, would go further towards our advancement in christian virtue, than the most splendid actions performed on the opposite ground.

That self-knowledge which teaches us humility, teaches us compassion also. The sick pity the sick. They sympathize with the disorder of which they feel the symptoms in themselves. Self-knowledge also checks injustice by establishing the equitable principle of showing the kindness we expect to receive; it represses ambition by convincing us how little we are entitled to superiority; it renders ad-

versity profitable by letting us see how much we deserve it; it makes prosperity safe, by directing our hearts to HIM who confers it, instead of receiving it as the consequence of our own desert.

We even carry our self-importance to the foot of the throne of God. When prostrate there we are not required, it is true, to forget ourselves, but we are required to remember HIM. We have indeed much sin to lament, but we have also much mercy to adore. We have much to ask, but we have likewise much to acknowledge. Yet our infinite obligations to God do not fill our hearts half as much as a petty uneasiness of our own; nor HIS infinite perfections as much as our own smallest want.

The great, the only effectual antidote to self-love, is to get the love of God and of our neighbour firmly rooted in the heart. Yet let us ever bear in mind that dependance on our fellow creatures is as carefully to be avoided as love of them is to be cultivated. There is none but God on whom the principles of love and dependance form but one duty.

CHAP. XIV.

ON THE CONDUCT OF CHRISTIANS IN THEIR INTERCOURSE WITH THE IRRELIGIOUS.

THE combination of integrity with discretion is the precise point at which a serious Christian must aim in his intercourse, and especially in his debates on religion, with men of the opposite description. He must consider himself as not only having his own

reputation but the honour of religion in his keeping. While he must on the one hand 'set his face as a flint' against any thing that may be construed into compromise or evasion, into denying or concealing any christian truth, or shrinking from any commanded duty, in order to conciliate favour; he must, on the other hand, be scrupulously careful never to maintain a christian doctrine with an unchristian temper. In endeavouring to convince, he must be cautious not needlessly to irritate. He must distinguish between the honour of God and the pride of his own character, and never be pertinaciously supporting the one, under the pretence that he is only maintaining the other. The dislike thus excited against the disputant is at once transferred to the principle, and the adversary's unfavourable opinion of religion is augmented by the faults of its champion. At the same time, the intemperate champion puts it out of his power to be of any future service to the man whom his offensive manners have disgusted.

A serious Christian, it is true, feels an honest indignation at hearing those truths on which his everlasting hopes depend, lightly treated. He cannot but feel his heart rise at the affront offered to his Maker. But instead of calling down fire from heaven on the reviler's head, he will raise a secret supplication to the God of heaven in his favour, which, if it change not the heart of his opponent, will not only tranquillize his own, but soften it towards his adversary; for we cannot easily hate the man for whom we pray.

He who advocates the sacred cause of Christianity, should be particularly aware of fancying that his being religious will atone for his being disagreeable; that his orthodoxy will justify his uncharitableness,

or his zeal make up for his indiscretion. He must not persuade himself that he has been serving God, when he has only been gratifying his own resentment, when he has actually by a fiery defence prejudiced the cause which he might perhaps have advanced by temperate argument and persuasive mildness. Even a judicious silence under great provocation is, in a warm temper, real forbearance. And though 'to keep silence from good words' may be pain and grief, yet the pain and grief must be borne, and the silence must be observed.

We sometimes see imprudent religionists glory in the attacks which their own indiscretion has invited. With more vanity than truth they apply the strong and ill-chosen term of persecution, to the sneers and ridicule which some impropriety of manner or some inadvertency of their own has occasioned. Now and then it is to be feared the censure may be deserved, and the high professor may possibly be but an indifferent moralist. Even a good man, a point we are not sufficiently ready to concede, may have been blamable in some instance on which his censurers will naturally have kept a keen eye. On these occasions how forcibly does the pointed caution recur, which was implied by the divine moralist on the mount, and enforced by the apostle Peter, to distinguish for whose sake we are calumniated.

By the way, this sharp look-out of worldly men on the professors of religion, is not without very important uses. While it serves to promote circumspection in the real Christian, the detection to which it leads in the case of the hollow professor, forms a broad and useful line of distinction between two classes of characters so essentially distinct, and yet so frequently, so unjustly, and so malevolently confounded.

The world believes, or at least affects to believe, that the correct and elegant minded religious man is blind to those errors and infirmities, that eccentricity and bad taste, that propensity to diverge from the straight line of prudence, which is discernible in some pious but ill-judging men, and which delight and gratify the enemies of true piety, as furnishing them with so plausible a ground for censure. But if the more judicious and better informed Christian bears with these infirmities, it is not that he does not clearly perceive and entirely condemn them. But he bears with what he disapproves for the sake of the zeal, the sincerity, the general usefulness of these defective characters: these good qualities are totally overlooked by the censurer, who is ever on the watch to aggravate the failings which christian charity laments without extenuating. It bears with them from the belief that impropriety is less mischievous than carelessness, a bad judgment than a bad heart, and some little excesses of zeal than gross immorality or total indifference.

We are not ignorant how much truth itself offends, though unassociated with any thing that is displeasing. This furnishes an important rule not to add to the unavoidable offence, by mixing the faults of our own character with the cause we support; because we may be certain that the enemy will take care never to separate them. He will always voluntarily maintain the pernicious association in his own mind. He will never think or speak of religion, without connecting with it the real or imputed bad qualities of all the religious men he knows or has heard of.

Let not then the friends of truth unnecessarily increase the number of her enemies. Let her not have

at once to sustain the assaults to which her divine character inevitably subjects her, and the obloquy to which the infirmities and foibles of her injudicious, and if there are any such, her unworthy champions expose her.

But we sometimes justify our rash violence under colour that our correct piety cannot endure the faults of others. The pharisees, overflowing with wickedness themselves, made the exactness of their own virtue a pretence for looking with horror on the publicans, whom our Saviour regarded with compassionate tenderness, while he reprobated with keen severity the sins, and especially the censoriousness of their accusers. 'Charity,' says an admirable French writer, 'is that law which Jesus Christ came down to bring into the world, to repair the divisions which sin has introduced into it: to be the proof of the reconciliation of man with God, by bringing him into obedience to the divine law; to reconcile him to himself by subjugating his passions to his reason; and in fine to reconcile him to all mankind, by curing him of the desire to domineer over them.'

But we put it out of our power to become the instruments of God in promoting the spiritual good of any one, if we stop up the avenue to his heart by violence or imprudence. We not only put it of our power to do good to all whom we disgust, but are we not liable to some responsibility for the failure of all the good we might have done them, had we not forfeited our influence by our indiscretion? What we do not to others, in relieving their spiritual as well as bodily wants, Christ will punish as not having been done to himself. This is one of the cases in which our own reputation is so insepa-

rably connected with that of religion, that we should be tender of one for the sake of the other.

The modes of doing good in society are various. We should sharpen our discernment to discover them; and our zeal to put them in practice. If we cannot open a man's eyes to the truth of religion by our arguments, we may perhaps open them to its beauty by our moderation. Though he may dislike Christianity in itself, he may, from admiring the forbearance of the Christian, be at last led to admire the principle from which it flowed. If he have hitherto refused to listen to the written evidences of religion, the temper of her advocate may be a new evidence of so engaging a kind, that his heart may be opened by the sweetness of the one to the verities of the other. He will at least be brought to allow that that religion cannot be very bad, the fruits of which are so amiable. The conduct of the disciple may in time bring him to the feet of the master. A new combination may be formed in his mind. He may begin to see what he had supposed antipathies reconciled, to unite two things which he thought as impossible to be brought together as the two poles—he may begin to couple candour with Christianity.

But if the mild advocate fail to convince, he may persuade; even if he fail to persuade, he will at least leave on the mind of the adversary such favourable impressions, as may induce him to inquire farther. He may be able to employ on some future occasion, to more effectual purpose, the credit which his forbearance will have obtained for him: whereas uncharitable vehemence would probably have for ever shut the ears and closed the heart of his opponent against any further intercourse.

But even if the temperate pleader should not be so happy as to produce any considerable effect on the mind of his antagonist, he is in any case promoting the interests of his own soul; he is at least imitating the faith and patience of the saints; he is cultivating that 'meek and quiet spirit' of which his blessed master gave at once the rule, the injunction, and the praise.

If 'all bitterness, and clamour, and malice, and evil speaking,' are expressly forbidden in ordinary cases, surely the prohibition must more peculiarly apply to the case of religious controversialists. Suppose Voltaire and Hume had been left to take their measure of our religion (as one would really suppose they had) from the defences of Christianity by their very able contemporary, bishop Warburton.—When they saw this Goliath in talents and learning, dealing about his ponderous blows, attacking with the same powerful weapons, not the enemies only, but the friends of Christianity, who happened to see some points in a different light from himself; not meeting them as his opponents, but pouncing on them as his prey; not seeking to defend himself, but tearing them to pieces; waging offensive war; delighting in unprovoked hostility—when they saw him thus advocate the christian cause, with a spirit diametrically opposite to Christianity, would they not exultingly exclaim, in direct opposition to the exclamation of the apostolic age, 'See how these Christians *hate* one another!' Whereas had his vast powers of mind and astonishing compass of knowledge been sanctified by the angelic meekness of archbishop Leighton, they would have been compelled to acknowledge, if Christianity be false, it is after all so amiable that it deserves to be true.

Might they not have applied to these two prelates what was said of Bossuet and Fenelon, '*l'un prouve la Religion, l'autre la fait aimer.*'

If we studiously contrive how to furnish the most complete triumph to infidels, contentious theology would be our best contrivance. They enjoy the wounds the combatants inflict on each other, not so much from the personal injury which either might sustain, as from the conviction that every attack, however it may terminate, weakens the common cause. In all engagements with a foreign foe, they know that Christianity *must* come off triumphantly. All their hopes are founded on a civil war.

If a forbearing temper should be maintained towards the irreligious, how much more by the professors of religion towards each other. As it is a lamentable instance of human infirmity that there is often much hostility carried on by good men, who profess the same faith; so it is a striking proof of the litigious nature of man that this spirit is less excited by broad distinctions, (such as conscience ought not to reconcile) than by shades of opinion, shades so few and light, that the world would not know they existed at all, if by their animosities the disputants were not so impatient to inform it.

While we should never withhold a clear and honest avowal of the great principles of our religion, let us discreetly avoid dwelling on inconsiderable distinctions, on which, as they do not affect the essentials either of faith or practice, we may allow another to maintain his opinion, while we steadily hold fast our own. But in religious as in military warfare, it almost seems as if the hostility were great in proportion to the littleness of the point contested. We all remember when two great nations

were on the point of being involved in war for a spot of ground* in another hemisphere, so little known that the very name had scarcely reached us; so inconsiderable that its possession would have added nothing to the strength of either. In civil too, as well as in national and theological disputes, there is often most stress laid on the most indifferent things. Why would the Spanish government some years ago so little consult the prejudices of the people, as nearly to produce an insurrection, by issuing an edict for them to relinquish the ancient national dress? Why was the security of the state, and the lives of the subjects put to hazard for a cloak and a jerkin? For the obstinate people made as firm a stand against this trifling requisition, as they could have made for the preservation of their civil or religious liberty, if they had been so happy as to possess either—a stand as firm as they are now nobly making in defence of their country and their independence.

Without invidiously enumerating any of the narrowing names which split Christianity in pieces, and which so unhappily drive the subjects of the Prince of Peace into interminable war, and range them into so many hostile bands, not against the common enemy, but against each other; we cannot forbear regretting that less temper is preserved among these near neighbours in local situation and in christian truth, than if the attack of either were levelled at Jews, Turks, or Infidels.

Is this that catholic spirit which embraces with the love of charity, though not of approbation, the whole offspring of our common Father—which in the

* Nootka Sound.

arms of its large affection, without vindicating their faults or adopting their opinions, 'takes every creature in of every kind,' and which like its gracious Author, 'would not that any thing should perish?'

The preference of remote to approximating opinions is, however, by no means confined to the religious world. The author of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, though so passionate an admirer of the prophet of Arabia as to raise a suspicion of his own Islamism; though so rapturous an eulogist of the apostate Julian as to raise a suspicion of his own polytheism, yet with an inconsistency not uncommon to unbelief, he treats the stout orthodoxy of the vehement Athanasius, with more respect than he shows to the 'scanty creed' of a contemporary philosopher and theologian, whose cold and comfortless doctrines were much less removed from his own.

Might not the twelve monsters which even the incredible strength and labour of Hercules found so hard to subdue, be interpreted as an ingenious allegory, by which were meant twelve popular prejudices? But though the hero went forth armed preternaturally, the goddess of Wisdom herself furnishing him with his helmet, and the god of eloquence with his arrows, yet it is not certain that he conquered the *religious* prejudices, not of the world, but even of Argos and Mycenæ; at least they were not among his earlier conquests; they were not serpents which an *infant* hand could strangle. They were more probably the fruitful hydra, which lost nothing by losing a head, a new head always starting up to supply the incessant decapitation. But though he slew the animal at last, might not its envenomed gore in which his arrows were dipped be

the perennial fountain in which persecuting bigotry, harsh intolerance, and polemical acrimony, have continued to dip their pens!

It is a delicate point to hit upon, neither to vindicate the truth in so coarse a manner as to excite a prejudice against it, nor to make any concessions in the hope of obtaining popularity. 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men,' can no more mean that we should exercise that false candour which conciliates at the expense of sincerity, than that we should defend truth with so intolerant a spirit, as to injure the cause by discrediting the advocate.

As the apostle beautifully obtests his brethren, not by the power and dignity, but 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,' so every Christian should adorn his doctrine by the same endearing qualities, evincing by the brightness of the polish, the solidity of the substance. But he will carefully avoid adopting the external appearance of these amiable tempers as substitutes for piety, when they are only its ornaments. Condescending manners may be one of the numberless modifications of selfishness, and reputation is thus often obtained, where it is not fairly earned. Carefully to examine whether he please others for their good to edification, or in order to gain praise and popularity, is the bounden duty of a Christian.

We should not be angry with the blind for not seeing, nor with the proud for not acknowledging their blindness. We ourselves perhaps were once as blind; happy if we are not still as proud. If not in this instance, in others perhaps they might have made more of our advantages than we have done; we, under their circumstances, might have been

more perversely wrong than they are, had we not been treated by the enlightened with more patient tenderness than we are disposed to exercise towards them. Tyre and Sidon, we are assured by Truth itself, would have repented, had they enjoyed the privileges which Chorazin and Bethsaida threw away. Surely we may do that for the love of God, and for the love of our opponent's soul, which well-bred men do through a regard to politeness. Why should a Christian be more ready to offend against the rule of charity than a gentleman against the rule of decorum? Candour in judging is like disinterestedness in acting; both as statutes of the royal law.

There is also a kind of right which men feel they possess to their own opinion. With this right it is often more difficult to part than even with the opinion itself. If our object be the real good of our opponent; if it be to promote the cause of truth, and not to contest for victory, we shall remember this. We shall consider what a value we put upon our own opinion: why should his, though a false one, be less dear to him, if he believes it true? This consideration will teach us not to expect too much at first. It will teach us the prudence of seeking some general point, in which we cannot fail to agree. This will let him see that we do not differ from him for the sake of differing; which conciliating spirit of ours may bring him to a temper to listen to arguments on topics where our disagreement is wider.

In disputing, for instance, with those who wholly reject the divine authority of the scriptures, we can gain nothing by quoting them, and insisting vehemently on the proof which is to be drawn from them, in support of the point in debate; their un-

questionable truth availing nothing with those who do not allow it. But if we take some common ground, on which both the parties can stand, and reason from the analogies of natural religion, and the way in which God proceeds in the known and acknowledged course of his providence, to the way in which he deals with us, and has declared he will deal with us, as the God revealed in the Bible; our opponent may be struck with the similarity and be put upon a track of consideration, and be brought to a temper *in* considering which may terminate in the happiest manner. He may be brought at length to be less averse from listening to us, on those grounds and principles of which probably he might otherwise never have seen the value.

Where a disputant of another description cannot endure what he sneeringly calls the strictness of evangelical religion, he will have no objection to acknowledge the momentous truths of man's responsibility to his Maker, of the omniscience, omnipresence, majesty and purity of God. Strive then to meet him on these grounds, and respectfully inquire if he can sincerely affirm that he is acting up to the truths he acknowledges?—If he is living in all respects as an accountable being ought to live?—If he is really conscious of acting as a being ought to act, who knows that he is continually acting under the eye of a just and holy God? You will find he cannot stand on these grounds. Either he must be contented to receive the truth as revealed in the gospel, or be convicted of inconsistency, or self-deceit, or hypocrisy. You will at least drive him off his own ground which he will find untenable, if you cannot bring him over to yours. But while the ene-

my is effecting his retreat, do not you cut off the means of his return?

Some Christians approve christianity as it is knowledge, rather than as it is principle. They like it as it yields a grand object of pursuit; as it enlarges their view of things, as it opens to them a wider field of inquiry, a fresh source of discovery, an additional topic of critical investigation. They consider it rather as extending the limits of their research, than as a means of ennobling their affections. It furnishes their understanding with a fund of riches on which they are eager to draw, not so much for the improvement of the heart as of the intellect. They consider it as a thesis on which to raise interesting discussion, rather than as premises from which to draw practical conclusions; as an incontrovertible truth, rather than as a rule of life.

There is something in the exhibition of sacred subjects given us by these persons, which according to our conception, is not only mistaken but pernicious. We refer to their treatment of religion as a mere science devested of its practical application, and taken rather as a code of philosophical speculations than of active principles. To explain our meaning, we might perhaps venture to except against the choice of topics almost exclusively made by these writers.

After they have spent half a life upon the evidences, the mere vestibule, so necessary, we allow, to be passed into the temple of Christianity, we accompany them into *their* edifice, and find it composed of materials but too coincident with their former taste. Questions of criticism, of grammar, of history, of metaphysics, of mathematics, and of all the sciences meet us, in the very place of that

which saint Paul tells us ' is the end of all,'—that is, ' Charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, from which' he adds, ' some having swerved, have turned aside to vain jangling.'*

We are very far from applying the latter term to all scientific discussions in religion, of which we should be the very last to deny the use, or question the necessity. Our main objection lies to the preponderance given to such topics by our controversialists in their divinity, and to the spirit too often manifested in their discussions. A preponderance it is, which makes us sometimes fear they consider these things rather as religion itself, than as helps to understand it, as the substitutes, not the allies of devotion. At the same time, a cold and philosophical spirit, often studiously maintained, seems to confirm the suspicion, that religion with them is not accidentally, but essentially, and solely an exercise of the wits, and a field for the display of intellectual prowess—as if the salvation of souls were a thing by the by.

These prize fighters in theology remind us of the philosophers of other schools: we feel as if we were reading Newton against Des Cartes, or the theory of caloric in opposition to phlogiston. ' Nous le regardons,' says the eloquent Saurin upon some religious subject, ' pour la plupart, de la meme maniere, dont on envisage les idées d'un ancien philosophe sur le gouvernement.'—The practical part of religion in

* See 1 Tim. i, 5, 6, also verse 4, in which the apostle hints at certain ' fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is by faith.' We dare not say how closely this description applies to some modern controvertists in theology.

short is forgotten, is lost in its theories; and what is worst of all, a temper hostile to the spirit of Christianity is employed to defend or illustrate its positions.

This latter effect might be traced beyond the foregoing causes, to another nearly allied to them—the habit of treating religion as a science capable of demonstration. On a subject evidently admitting but of moral evidence, we lament to see questions dogmatically proved, instead of being temperately argued. Nay we could almost smile at the sight of some intricate and barren novelty in religion, *demonstrated* to the satisfaction of some one ingenious theorist, who draws upon himself instantly a hundred confutations of every position he maintains. The ulterior stages of the debate are often such as might 'make angels weep.' And when we remember that even in the most important questions, involving eternal interests, 'probability is the very guide of life,'* we could most devoutly wish, that on subjects, to say the least, not 'generally necessary to salvation,' infallibility were not the claim of the disputant, or personal animosity the condition of his failure.

Such speculatists who are more anxious to make proselytes to an opinion, than converts to a principle, will not be so likely to convince an opponent, as the Christian who is known to act up to his convictions, and whose genuine piety will put life and heart into his reasonings. The opponent probably knows already all the ingenious arguments which books supply. Ingenuity therefore, if he be a candid man, will not be so likely to touch him, as that 'godly sincerity' which he cannot but perceive the heart of

* Butler's Introduction to 'The Analogy.'

his antagonist is dictating to his lips. There is a simple energy in pure christian truth which a factitious principle imitates in vain. The 'knowledge which puffeth up' will make few practical converts unaccompanied with the 'charity which edifieth.'

To remove prejudices, then, is the bounden duty of a Christian, but he must take care not to remove them by conceding what integrity forbids him to concede. He must not wound his conscience to save his credit. If an ill bred roughness disgusts another, a dishonest complaisance undoes himself. He must remove all obstructions to the reception of truth, but the truth itself he must not adulterate. In clearing away the impediment, he must secure the principle.

If his own reputation be attacked, he must defend it by every lawful means; nor will he sacrifice the valuable possession to any demand but that of conscience, to any call but the imperative call of duty. If his good name be put in competition with any other earthly good, he will preserve it, however dear may be the good he relinquishes; but, if the competition lie between his reputation and his conscience, he has no hesitation in making the sacrifice, costly as it is. A feeling man struggles for his fame as for his life, but if he be a Christian, he parts with it, for he knows that it is not the life of his soul.

For the same reason that we must not be over anxious to vindicate our fame, we must be careful to preserve it from any unjust imputation. The great apostle of the Gentiles has set us an admirable example in both respects, and we should never consider him in one point of view, without recollecting his conduct in the other. So profound is his

humility that he declares himself 'less than the least of all saints.' Not content with this comparative depreciation, he proclaims his actual corruptions. 'In me, that is, in my flesh, there is no good thing.' Yet this deep self-abasement did not prevent him from asserting his own calumniated worth, from declaring that he was not behind the very 'chiefest of the apostles;'—again—'As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting,' &c. He then enumerates, with a manly dignity, tempered with a noble modesty, a multitude of instances of his unparalleled sufferings and his unrivalled zeal.

Where only his own personal feelings were in question, how self-abasing, how self-annihilating! But where the unjust imputation involved the honour of Christ and the credit of religion 'what carefulness is wrought in him, yea what clearing of himself; yea what indignation; yea what vehement desire; yea what zeal!'

While we rejoice in the promises annexed to the beatitudes, we should be cautious of applying to ourselves promises which do not belong to us, particularly that which is attached to the last beatitude. When our fame is attacked, let us carefully inquire, if we are 'suffering for righteousness' sake,' or for our own faults; let us examine, whether we may not deserve the censures we have incurred. Even if we are suffering in the cause of God, may we not have brought discredit on that holy cause by our imprudence, our obstinacy, our vanity; by our zeal without knowledge, and our earnestness without temper? Let us inquire, whether our revilers have not some foundation for the charge? Whether we have not sought our own glory more than that of God? Whether we are not more disappointed at missing

that revenue of praise, which we thought our good works were entitled to bring us in, than at the wound religion may have sustained? Whether, though our views were right on the whole, their purity was not much alloyed by human mixtures? Whether, neglecting to count the cost, we did not expect unmixed approbation, uninterrupted success, and a full tide of prosperity and applause, totally forgetting the reproaches received, and the obloquy sustained by 'the Man of Sorrows.'

If we can on an impartial review, acquit ourselves as to the general purity of our motives, the general integrity of our conduct, the unfeigned sincerity of our endeavours, then we may indeed, though with deep humility, take to ourselves the comfort of this divine beatitude. When we really find, that men only speak evil of us for *his* sake in whose cause we have laboured, however that labour may have been mingled with imperfection, we may indeed 'rejoice and be exceeding glad.' Submission may be elevated into gratitude, and forgiveness into love.

CHAP. XV.

ON THE PROPRIETY OF INTRODUCING RELIGION IN GENERAL CONVERSATION.

MAY we be allowed to introduce here an opinion warmly maintained in the world, and which indeed strikes at the root of all rules for the management of religious debate recommended in the preceding

chapter? It is, that the subject of religion ought on no occasion to be introduced in mixed company; that the diversity of sentiment upon it is so great, and so nearly connected with the tenderest feelings of our minds, as to be liable to lead to heat and contention. Finally, that it is too grave and solemn a topic to be mixed in the miscellaneous circle of social discourse, much less in the festive effusions of convivial cheerfulness. Now, in answer to these allegations, we must at least insist, that should religion, on other grounds, be found entitled to social discussion, the last observation, if true, would prove convivial cheerfulness incompatible with the spirit and practice of religion, rather than religion inadmissible into cheerful parties. And it is certainly a retort difficult of evasion, that where to introduce Religion herself is to endanger her honour, there she rather suffers in reputation by the presence of her friend. The man endeared by conviction to his religion will never bear to be long, much less to be statedly separated from the object of his affections: and he whose zeal once determined him 'to know *nothing*' amongst his associates, 'but Jesus Christ and him crucified,' never could have dreamt of a latitude of interpretation, which would admit a Christian into scenes where *every thing* but Jesus Christ and him crucified, might be recognised with credit.

These principles appear so plain and incontrovertible, that the question seems rather to call for a different statement, viz. Why religion should not be deemed admissible into every social meeting and friendly circle in which a Christian himself would choose to be found? That it is too weighty and important a subject for discussion, is an argument, which, standing alone, assumes the gross absurdity

that either men never talk of that which most nearly interests them, or that when they do, they talk improperly. They will not, it is true, introduce a private concern, however important, in which no one is interested but themselves. But in the subject of religion, who is not interested? Or where will topics be found more universal in their application to all times, persons, places and circumstances, as well as more important, than those which relate to the eternal welfare of mankind?

Nor will it be avowed with greater colour of reason, that topics so important suffer in point of gravity, or in the respect of mankind, by frequent discussion. We never observed men grow indifferent to their health, their affairs, their friends, their country, in proportion as these were made the subjects of their familiar discourse. On the contrary, oblivion has been noticed as the offspring of silence. The man who never mentions his friend is, we think, in general most likely to forget him. And far from deeming the name of ONE, greater than any earthly friend 'taken in vain,' when mentioned discreetly in conversation, we generally find him most remembered and respected in secret, by those whose memories are occasionally refreshed by a reference to his word and authority in public. 'Familiarity,' indeed, we have been told, 'produces contempt;' a truism, on which we are convinced many persons, honestly, though blindly, rest their habitual, and even systematic reserve on religious subjects. But 'familiarity' in our mind has reference rather to the manner, than to the act, of introducing religion. To us it is synonymous with a certain trite and trivial repetition of serious remarks, evidently 'to no profit,' which we sometimes hear from persons fami-

liarized, rather by education than feeling, to the language of piety.

More particularly we refer it to a still more criminal habit, which, to their disgrace, some professors of religion share with the profane, of raising a laugh by the introduction of a religious observation or even a scriptural quotation. 'To court a grin when we should woo a soul,' is surely an abuse of religion, as well in the parlour as the pulpit. Nor has the senate itself been always exempt from this impropriety. Dr. Johnson has long since pronounced a jest drawn from the Bible, the vulgarest because the easiest of all jests.—And far from perverting religious topics to such a purpose himself, a feeling Christian would not often be found, where such would be the probable consequence of offering a pious sentiment in company.

That allusions involving religious questions are often productive of dispute and altercation, is a fact, which though greatly exaggerated, must yet in a degree be admitted. This circumstance may in some measure account for the singular reception which a religious remark is often observed to meet with in the world. It is curious to notice the surprise and alarm which, on such occasions, will frequently pervade the party present. The remark is received as a stranger guest, of which no one knows the quality or intentions. And, like a species of intellectual foundling, it is cast upon the company without a friend to foster its infancy, or to own any acquaintance with the parent. A fear of consequences prevails. It is obvious that the feeling is—'We know not into what it may grow; it is therefore safer to stifle it in the birth.' This, if not the avowed, is the implied sentiment.

But is not this delicacy, this *mauvaise honte*, so peculiar perhaps to our countrymen on religious subjects, the very cause which operates so unfavourably upon that effect which it labours to obviate? Is not the very infrequency of moral or religious observations, a sufficient account to be given both of the perplexity and the irritation said to be consequent upon their introduction? And were not religion (we mean such religious topics as may legitimately arise in mixed society,) banished so much as it is from conversation, might not its occasional recurrence become by degrees as natural, perhaps as interesting, certainly as instructive, and after all as safe, as 'a close committee on the weather,' or any other of the authorized topics which are about as productive of amusement as of instruction? People act as if religion were to be regarded at a distance; as if even a respectful ignorance were to be preferred to a more familiar approach. This reserve, however, does not give an air of respect, so much as of mystery, to religion. An able writer* has observed, '*that* was esteemed the most sacred part of pagan devotion which was the most impure, and the only thing that was commendable in it is, that it was kept a great mystery.' He approves of nothing in this religion but the modesty of withdrawing itself from the eyes of the world.—But Christianity requires not to be shrouded in any such mysterious recesses. She does not, like the Eastern monarchs, owe her dignity to her concealment. She is, on the contrary, most honoured where most known, and most revered where most clearly visible.

It will be obvious that hints rather than arguments belong to our present undertaking. In this view,

* Bishop Sherlock.

we may perhaps be excused if we offer a few general observations, upon the different occasions on which a well regulated mind would be solicitous to introduce religion into social discourse. The person possessed of such a mind, would be mainly anxious, in a society of Christians, that something should appear indicative of their profession. He would accordingly feel a strong desire to effect it, when he plainly perceived his company engaged on no other topic either innocently entertaining, or rationally instructive. This desire, however, would by no means cloud his brow, give an air of impatience to his countenance, or render him inattentive to the general tone and temper of the circle. On the contrary, he would endeavour to feel additional interest in his neighbour's suggestions, in proportion as he hoped in turn to attract notice to his own. He would show long forbearance to the utmost extent of conscientious toleration. In the prosecution of his favourite design, he would never attempt a forced or unreasonable allusion to serious subjects; a caution requiring the nicest judgment and discrimination, most particularly where he felt the sentiments or the zeal of his company to be not congenial with his own. His would be the spirit of the prudent mariner, who does not approach even his native shore without carefully watching the winds, and sounding the channels; knowing well that a temporary delay, even on an unfriendly element, is preferable to a hasty landing his company, on shore indeed, but upon the point of a rock.

Happily for our present purpose, the days we live in, afford circumstances both of foreign and domestic occurrence, of every possible variety of colour and connexion, so as to leave scarcely any mind unfur-

nished with a store of progressive remarks by which the most instructive truths may be approached through the most obvious topics. And a prudent mind will study to make its approaches to such an ultimate object, progressive: it will know also where to stop, rather indeed out of regard to others than to itself. And in the manly avowal of its sentiments, avoiding as well what is canting in utterance as technical in language, it will make them at once appear not the ebullition of an ill educated imagination, but the result of a long exercised understanding.

Nothing will be more likely to attract attention or secure respect to your remarks, than the good taste in which they are delivered. On common topics, we reckon him the most elegant speaker whose pronunciation and accent are so free from all peculiarities, that it cannot be determined to what place he owes his birth. A polished critic of Rome accuses one of the finest of her historians of provinciality. This is a fault obvious to less enlightened critics, since the Attic herb-woman could detect the provincial dialect of a great philosopher. Why must religion have her *Patavinity?* Why must the Christian adopt the quaintness of a party, or a scholar the idiom of the illiterate? Why should a valuable truth be combined with a vulgar or fanatical expression? If either would offend when separate, how inevitably must they disgust when the one is mistakingly intended to set off the other. Surely this is not enchasing our 'apples of gold in pictures of silver.'

We must not close this part of our subject without alluding to another, and still more delicate introduction of religion, in the way of *reproof.* Here is indeed a point in religious conduct to which we

feel it a boldness to make any reference at all. Bold indeed, is that casuist, who would lay down general rules on a subject where the consciences of men seem to differ so widely from each other: and feeble too often will be his justest rules, where the feelings of timidity or delicacy rush in with a force which sweeps down many a land-mark erected for its own guidance, even by conscience itself.

Certainly much allowance, perhaps respect, is due in cases of very doubtful decision, to those feelings which, after the utmost self-regulation of mind, are found to be irresistible. And certainly the habits and modes of address attached to refined society, are such as to place personal observations on a very different footing to that on which they stand by nature. A frown, even a cold and disapproving look, may be a reception which the profane expression or loose action of a neighbour of rank and opulence, may have never before encountered from his flatterers or convivial companions. A vehement censure in his case might inflame his resentment without amending his fault. Whether the attempt be to correct a vice or rectify an error, one object should ever be steadily kept in view—to conciliate rather than to contend, to inform but not to insult, to evince that we assume, not the character of a dictator, but the office of a Christian friend; that we have the best interests of the offender, and the honour of religion at heart, and that to reprove is so far from a gratification, that it is a trial to ourselves, the effort of conscience, not the effect of choice.

The feelings, therefore, of the person to be admonished should be most scrupulously consulted. The admonition, if necessarily strong, explicit and personal, should yet be friendly, temperate, and

well bred. An offence, even though publicly committed, is generally best reproved, in private, perhaps in writing. Age, superiority of station, previous acquaintance, above all, that sacred profession to which the honour of religion is happily made a personal concern, are circumstances which especially call for, and sanction the attempt recommended. And he must surely be unworthy his Christian vocation, who would not conscientiously use any influence or authority which he might chance to possess, in discountenancing or rectifying the delinquency he condemns.

We are, indeed, as elsewhere, after the closest reflection and longest discussion, often forced into the general conclusion, that "a good heart is the best casuist.' And doubtless where true christian benevolence towards man meets in the same mind with an honest zeal for the glory of God, a way will be found, let us rather say will be opened, for the right exercise of this, as of every virtuous disposition.

Let us ever remember what we have so often insisted on, that self-denial is the ground work, the indispensable requisite for every Christian virtue; that without the habitual exercise of this principle, we shall never be followers of him 'who pleased not himself.' And when we are called by conscience to the largest use of it in practice, we must arm ourselves with the highest considerations for the trial; we must consider him, who (through his faithful reproofs) 'endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.' And when even from Moses we hear the truly evangelical precept, 'thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him;' we must duly weigh how strongly its perform-

ance is enforced upon ourselves, by the conduct of one greater than Moses, who expressly 'suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his footsteps.'

CHAP. XVI.

CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS.

Of all the motives to vigilance and self-discipline which Christianity presents, there is not one more powerful than the danger, from which even religious persons are not exempt, of slackening in zeal and declining in piety. Would we could affirm, that coldness in religion is confined to the irreligious! If it be melancholy to observe an absence of Christianity where no great profession of it was ever made, it is far more grievous to mark its declension, where it once appeared not only to exist, but to flourish. We feel on the comparison, the same distinct sort of compassion with which we contemplate the pecuniary distresses of those who have been always indigent, and of those who have fallen into want from a state of opulence. Our concern differs not only in degree but in kind.

This declension is one of the most awakening calls to watchfulness, to humility and self-inspection, which religion can make to him 'who thinketh he standeth;' which it can make to him who, sensible of his own weakness, ought to feel the necessity 'of strengthening the things which remain that are ready to die.'

If there is not any one circumstance which ought more to alarm and quicken the christian, than that of finding himself grow languid and indifferent, after having made not only a profession but a progress, so there is not a more reasonable motive of triumph to the profane, not one cause which excites in him a more plausible ground of suspicion, either that there never was any truth in the profession of the person in question, or which is a more fatal, and, to such a mind, a more natural conclusion—that there is no truth in religion itself. At best, he will be persuaded that this can only be a faint and feeble principle, the impulse of which is so soon exhausted, and which is by no means found sufficiently powerful to carry on its votary throughout his course. He is assured that piety is only an outer garment, put on for show or convenience, and that when it ceases to be wanted for either it is laid aside. In these unhappy instances the evil seldom ceases with him who causes it. The inference becomes general, that all religious men are equally unsound or equally deluded, only that some are more prudent, or more fortunate, or greater hypocrites than others. After the falling away of one promising character, the old suspicion recurs and is confirmed, and the defection of others pronounced to be infallible.

There seems to be this marked distinction in the different opinions which religious and worldly men entertain respecting human corruption. The candid christian is contented to believe it, as an indisputable general truth, while he is backward to suspect the wickedness of the individual, nor does he allow himself to give full credit to particular instances without proof. The man of the world, on the contrary, who denies the general principle, is

extremely prone to suspect the individual: Thus his knowledge of mankind not only furnishes a proof, but outstrips the truth of the doctrine; though he denies it as a proposition of Scripture, he is eager to establish it as a fact of experiment.

But the probability is, that the man, who by his departure from the principles with which he appeared to set out, so much gratifies the thoughtless, and grieves the serious mind, never was a sound and genuine christian. His religion was perhaps taken up on some accidental circumstance, built on some false ground, produced by some evanescent cause; and though it cannot be fairly pronounced that he intended by his forward profession and prominent zeal, to deceive others, it is probable that he himself was deceived. Perhaps he had made too sure of himself. His early profession was probably rather bold and ostentatious; he had imprudently fixed his stand on ground so high as to be not easily tenable, and from which a descent would be but too observable. While he thought he never could be too secure of his own strength, he allowed himself to be too censorious on the infirmities of others, especially of those whom he had apparently outstripped, and who, though they had started together, he had left behind him in the race.

Might it not be a safer course, if in the outset of the christian life, a modest and self-distrusting humility were to impose a temporary restraint on the forwardness of outward profession? A little knowledge of the human heart, a little suspicion of the deceitfulness of his own, would not only moderate the intemperance of an ill-understood zeal, should the warm convert become an established christian, but would save the credit of religion, which will re-

ceive a fresh wound, in the possible event of his desertion from her standard.

Some of the most distinguished Christians in this country began their religious career with this graceful humility. They would not suffer their change of character, and their adoption of new principles, and a new course to be blazoned abroad, as the affectionate zeal of their confidential friends would have advised, till the principles they had adopted were established, and worked into habits of piety; till time and experience had evinced that the grace of God had not been bestowed on them in vain. Their progress proved to be such as might have been inferred from the modesty of their outset. They have gone on with a perseverance which difficulties have only contributed to strengthen, and experience to confirm; and will, through divine aid, doubtless go on, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

But to return to the less steady convert. Perhaps religion was only, as we have hinted elsewhere, one pursuit among many which he had taken up when other pursuits failed, and which he now lays down, because his faith not being rooted and grounded, fails also;—or the temptations arising from without might concur with the failure within. If vanity be his infirmity, he will shrink from the pointed disapprobation of his superiors. If the love of novelty be his besetting weakness, the very peculiarity and strictness of religion, the very marked departure from the 'gay and primrose path' in which he had before been accustomed to walk, which first attracted, now repels him. The attention which his early deviation from the manners of the world drew upon him and which once flattered, now disgusts him.

The very opposition which once animated, now cools him. He is discouraged at the near view, subdued by the required practice, of that Christian self-denial which, as a speculation, had appeared so delightful. Perhaps his fancy had been fired by some act of Christian heroism, which he felt an ambition to imitate: a feeling which tales of martial prowess, or deeds of chivalry, something that, promising celebrity and exciting emulation, had often kindled before. The truth is, religion had only taken hold of his imagination, his heart had been left out of the question.

Or he had in the twilight of his first awakening, seen religion only as something to be believed—he now finds that much is to be done in the new life, and much which was habitual to the old one, left undone.—Above all he did not reckon on the CONSISTENCY which the christian life demands. Warm affections rendered the practice of some right actions easy to him; but he did not include in his faulty and imperfect scheme, the self-denial, the perseverance, the renouncing of his own will and his own way, the evil report, as well as the good report, to which every man pledges himself, when he enlists under the banner of Christ. The cross which it was easy to venerate, he finds it hard to bear.

Or religion might be adopted when he was in affliction, and he is now happy;—when he was in bad circumstances, and he is now grown affluent. Or it might be assumed as something wanting to his recommendation to that party or project by which he wished to make his way; as something that would better enable him to carry certain points which he had in view; something that, with the new acquaintance he wished to cultivate, might obliterate cer-

tain defects, in his former conduct, and white-wash a somewhat sullied reputation.

Or in his now more independent situation, it may be he is surrounded by temptations, softened by blandishments, allured by pleasures, which he never expected would arise to weaken his resolutions. These new enchantments make it not so easy to be pious, as when he had little to lose and every thing to desire, as when the world wore a frowning, and religion an inviting aspect.—Or he is perhaps by the vicissitudes of life, transferred from a sober and humble society, where to be religious was honourable, to a more fashionable set of associates, where, as the disclosure of his piety would add nothing to his credit, he set out with taking pains to conceal it, till it has fallen into that gradual oblivion, which is the natural consequence of its being kept out of sight.

But we proceed to a far more interesting and important character. The one indeed whom we have been slightly sketching, may by his inconstancy do much harm; the one on which we are about to animadvert, might by his consistency and perseverance effect essential good.—Even the sincere, and to all appearance, the established Christian, especially if his situation in life be easy, and his course smooth and prosperous, had need keep a vigilant eye upon his own heart. For such a one it will not be sufficient that he keep his ground if he do not advance in it. Indeed it will be a sure proof that he has gone back, if he has not advanced.

In a world so beset with snares, various are the causes which may possibly occasion in even good men a slow but certain decline in piety. A decline scarcely perceptible at first, but which becomes more visible in its subsequent stages. When therefore we

suspect our hearts of any declension in piety, we should not compare ourselves with what we were in the preceding week or month, but what we were at the supposed height of our character. Though the alteration was not perceptible in its gradual progress, one shade melting into the next, and each losing its distinctness, yet when the two remote states are brought into contrast, the change will be strikingly obvious.

Among other causes, may be assigned the indiscreet forming of some worldly connexion especially that of marriage. In this connexion, for *union* it cannot be called, it is to be lamented that the irreligious more frequently draw away the religious to their side, than that the contrary takes place; a circumstance easily accounted for by those who are at all acquainted with the human heart.

Or the sincere but incautious Christian may be led by a strong affection which assumes the shape of virtue, into a fond desire of establishing his children advantageously in the world, into methods which if not absolutely incorrect, are yet ambiguous at the best. In order to raise those whom he loves to a station above their level, he may be tempted, while self-deceit will teach him to sanctify the deed by the motive, to make some little sacrifices of principle, some little abatements of that strict rectitude, for which, in the abstract, no man would more strenuously contend. And as it may be in general observed, that the most amiable minds are most susceptible of the strongest natural affections; of course the very tenderness of the heart lays such characters peculiarly open to a danger, to which the unfeeling and the obdurate are less exposed.

If the person in question be of the sacred order, no small danger may arise from his living under the eye of an irreligious, but rich and bountiful patron. It is his duty to make religion appear amiable in his eyes. He ought to conciliate his good will by every means which rectitude can sanction. But though his very piety will stimulate his discretion in the adoption of those means, he will take care never to let his discretion intrench on his integrity.

If he be under obligations to him, he may be in danger of testifying his gratitude, and furthering his hopes by some electioneering manœuvres, and by too much electioneering society. He may, unawares, be tempted to too much conformity to his friend's habits, too much conviviality in his society. And when he witnesses so much kindness and urbanity in his manners, possibly so much usefulness and benevolence in his life, he may be even tempted to suspect that he himself may be wrong; to accuse himself of being somewhat churlish in his own temper, a little too austere in his habits, and rather hard in his judgment of a man so amiable. He will be still more likely to fall into this error if he expects a favour than if he has obtained it; for though it is not greatly to the honour of human nature, we daily see how much keener are the feelings which are excited by hope than those which are raised by gratitude. The favour which has been already conferred, excites a temperate, that which we are looking for, a fervid feeling.

These relaxing feelings and these softened dispositions, aided by the seducing luxury of the table, and the bewitching splendor of the apartment; by the soft accommodations which opulence exhibits; and the desires which they are too apt to awaken in

the dependant, may, not impossibly, lead by degrees, to a criminal timidity in maintaining the purity of his own principles, in supporting the strictness of his own practice. He may gradually lose somewhat of the dignity of his professional, and of the sobriety of his Christian character. He may be brought to forfeit the independence of his mind; and in order to magnify his fortune, may neglect to magnify his office.

Even here, from an increasing remissness in self-examination, he may deceive himself by persisting to believe—for the films are now grown thicker over his spiritual sight—that his motives are defensible. Were not his discernment labouring under a temporary blindness, he would reprobate the character which interested views have insensibly drawn him in to act. He would be as much astonished to be told that his character was become his own, as was the royal offender, when the righteous boldness of the prophet pronounced the heart-appalling words, 'Thou art the man.'

Still he continues to flatter himself that the reason of his diminished opposition to the faults of his friend, is not because he has a more lucrative situation in view, but because he may, by a slight temporary concession, and a short suspension of a severity which he begins to fancy he has carried too far, secure for his future life a more extensive field of usefulness, in the benefice which is hanging over his head.

In the mean time, hope and expectation so fill his mind, that he insensibly grows cold in the prosecution of his positive duties. He begins to lament that in his present situation he can make but few converts, that he sees but small effects of his labours.

not perceiving that God may have withdrawn his blessing from a ministry which is exercised on such questionable grounds. With his new expectations he continues to blend his old ideas. He feasts his imagination with the prospect of a more fruitful harvest on an unknown, and perhaps an unbroken soil—as if human nature were not pretty much the same every where; as if the labourer were accountable for the abundance of his crop, and not solely for his own assiduity; as if actual duty, faithfully performed, even in that circumscribed sphere in which God has cast our lot, is not more acceptable to him, than theories of the most extensive good, than distant speculations and improbable projects, for the benefit even of a whole district; while, in the indulgence of those airy schemes, our own specific and appointed work lies neglected, or is performed without energy and without attention.

Self-love so naturally infatuates the judgment, that it is no paradox to assert that we look too far, and yet do not look far enough. We look too far when passing over the actual duties of the immediate scene, we form long connected trains of future projects, and indulge our thoughts in such as are most remote, and perhaps least probable. And we do not look far enough when the prospective mind does not shoot beyond all these little earthly distances, to that state, falsely called remote, whither all our steps are not the less tending, because our eyes are confined to the home scenes. But while the precariousness of our duration ought to set limits to our designs, it should furnish incitements to our application. Distant projects are too apt to slaken present industry; while the magnitude of schemes, pro-

bably impracticable, may render our actual exertions cold and sluggish.

Let it be observed that we would be the last to censure any of those fair and honourable means of improving his condition, which every man, be he worldly or religious, owes to himself, and to his family. Saints as well as sinners have in common, what a great genius calls, 'certain inconvenient appetites of eating and drinking;' which while we are in the body must be complied with. It would be a great hardship on good men, to be denied any innocent means of fair gratification. It would be a peculiar injustice that the most diligent labourer should be esteemed the least worthy of his hire, the least fit to rise in his profession.

The more serious clergyman has also the same warm affection for his children with his less scrupulous brother, and consequently the same laudable desire for their comfortable establishment; only in his plans for their advancement he should neither entertain ambitious views nor prosecute any views, even the best, by methods not consonant to the strictness of his avowed principles. Professing to 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' he ought to be more exempt from an over anxious solicitude than those who profess it less zealously. Avowing a more determined confidence that all other things will, as far as they are absolutely necessary, 'be added unto him,' he should, as it is obvious he commonly does, manifest practically, a more implicit trust, confiding in that gracious and cheering promise, that promise expressed both negatively and positively, as if to comfort by a double confirmation, that God who is 'both his light and efence, who will give grace and worship, will also

withhold no good thing from them that live a godly life.'

It is one of the trials of faith appended to the sacred office, that its ministers, like the father of the faithful, are liable to go out, 'not knowing whither they go;' and this not only at their first entrance into their profession, but throughout life; an inconvenience to which no other profession is necessarily liable; a trial which is not perhaps fairly estimated.

This remark will naturally raise a laugh among those who at once hold the function in contempt, deride its ministers, and think their well-earned remuneration lavishly and even unnecessarily bestowed. They will probably exclaim with as much complacency in their ridicule, as if it were really the test of truth—'A great cause of commiseration truly, to be transferred from a starving curacy to a plentiful benefice, or from the vulgar society of a country parish, to be a stalled theologian in an opulent town!'

We are far from estimating at a low rate the exchange from a state of uncertainty to a state of independence, from a life of penury to comfort, or from a barely decent to an affluent provision.—But does the ironical remarker rate the feelings and affections of the heart at nothing? If he insists that money is that *chief* good of which ancient philosophy says so much, we beg leave to insist that it is not the *only* good. We are above the affectation of pretending to condole with any man on his exaltation, but there are feelings which a man of acute sensibility, rendered more acute by an elegant education, values more intimately than silver or gold.

Is it absolutely nothing to resign his local comforts, to break up his local attachments, to have new

connexions to form, and that frequently at an advanced period of life? Connexions, perhaps less valuable than those he is quitting? Is it nothing for a faithful minister to be separated from an affectionate people, a people not only whose friendship, but whose progress has constituted his happiness here, as it will make his joy and crown of rejoicing hereafter?

Men of delicate minds estimate things by their affections as well as by their circumstances: to a man of a certain cast of character, a change however advantageous, may be rather an exile than a promotion. While he gratefully accepts the good, he receives it with an edifying acknowledgment of the imperfection of the best human things. These considerations we confess add the additional feelings of kindness to their persons, and of sympathy with their vicissitudes, to our respect and veneration for their holy office.

To themselves, however, the precarious tenure of their situation presents an instructive emblem of the uncertain condition of human life, of the transitory nature of the world itself. Their liableness to a sudden removal, gives them the advantage of being more especially reminded of the necessity and duty of keeping in a continual posture of preparation, having 'their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand.' They have also the same promises which supported the Israelites in the desert.—The same assurance which cheered Abraham, may still cheer the true servants of God under all difficulties.—'Fear not—I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.'

But there are perils on the right hand and on the left. It is not among the least, that though a pious

clergyman may at first have tasted with trembling caution of the delicious cup of applause, he may gradually grow, as thirst is increased by indulgence, to drink too deeply of the enchanted chalice. The dangers arising from any thing that is good, are formidable, because unsuspected. And such are the perils of popularity, that we will venture to say that the victorious general, who has conquered a kingdom, or the sagacious statesman who has preserved it, is almost in less danger of being spoilt by acclamation than the popular preacher; because *their* danger is likely to happen but once, his is perpetual. Theirs is only on a day of triumph, his day of triumph occurs every week; we mean the admiration he excites. Every fresh success ought to be a fresh motive to humiliation; he who feels his danger will vigilantly guard against swallowing too greedily the indiscriminate, and often undistinguishing plaudits which his doctrines or his manner, his talents or his voice, may equally procure for him.

If he be not prudent as well as pious, he may be brought to humour his audience, and his audience to flatter him with a dangerous emulation, till they will scarcely endure truth itself from any other lips. Nay, he may imperceptibly be led not to be always satisfied with the attention and improvement of his hearers, unless the attention be sweetened by flattery, and the improvement followed by exclusive attachment.

The spirit of exclusive fondness generates a spirit of controversy. Some of the followers will rather improve in casuistry than in Christianity. They will be more busied in opposing Paul to Apollos, than looking unto 'Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith;' than in bringing forth fruits meet for repen-

tance. Religious gossip may assume the place of religion itself. A party spirit is thus generated, and Christianity may begin to be considered as a thing to be discussed and disputed, to be heard and talked about, rather than as the productive principle of virtuous conduct.*

We owe, indeed, lively gratitude and affectionate attachment to the minister who has faithfully laboured for our edification; but the author has sometimes noticed a manner adopted by some injudicious adherents, especially of her own sex, which seems rather to erect their favourite into the head of a sect, than to reverence him as the pastor of a flock. This mode of evincing an attachment, amiable in itself, is doubtless as distressing to the delicacy of the minister as it is unfavourable to religion, to which it is apt to give an air of party.

May we be allowed to animadvert more immediately on the cause of declension in piety, in some persons who formerly exhibited evident marks of that seriousness in their lives which they continue to inculcate from the pulpit. If such has been sometimes (we hope it has been very rarely) the case, may it not be partly ascribed to an unhappy notion that the same exactness in his private devotion, the same watchfulness in his daily conduct, is not equally necessary in the advanced progress as in the first stages of a religious course? He does not desist from warning his hearers of the continual necessity of these things, but is he not in some danger of not applying the necessity to himself? May he not begin

* This polemic tattle is of a totally different character from that species of religious conversation recommended in the preceding chapter.

to rest satisfied with the inculcation without the practice? It is not probable indeed that he goes so far as to establish himself as an exempt case, but he slides from indolence into the exemption, as if its avoidance were not so necessary for him as for others.

Even the very sacredness of his profession is not without a snare. He may repeat the holy offices so often that he may be in danger on the one hand, of sinking into the notion that it is a mere profession, or on the other, of so resting in it as to make it supercede the necessity of that strict personal religion with which he set out: He may at least be satisfied with the occasional, without the uniform practice. There is a danger—we advert only to its possibility—that his very exactness in the public exercise of his function, may lead to a little justification of his remissness in secret duties. His zealous exposition of the scriptures to others may satisfy him, though it does not always lead to a practical application of them to himself.

But God, by requiring exemplary diligence in the devotion of his appointed servants, would keep up in their minds a daily sense of their dependance on him. If he does not continually teach by his spirit those who teach others, they have little reason to expect success, and that spirit will not be given where it is not sought; or, which is an awful consideration, may be withdrawn, where it had been given and not improved as it might have been.

Should this unhappily ever be the case, it would almost reduce the minister of Christ to a mere engine, a vehicle through which knowledge was barely to pass, like the ancient oracles who had nothing to do with the information but to convey it. Perhaps

the public success of the best men has been, under God, principally owing to this, that their faithful ministration in the temple has been uniformly preceded and followed by petitions in the closet; that the truths implanted in the one, have chiefly flourished from having been watered by the tears and nourished by the prayers of the other.

We will hazard but one more observation on this dangerous and delicate subject; in this superficial treatment of which, it is the thing in the world the most remote from the writer's wish, to give the slightest offence to any pious member of an order which possesses her highest veneration. If the indefatigable labourer in his great Master's vineyard, has, as must often be the case, the mortification of finding that his labours have failed of producing their desired effect, in some instance, where his warmest hopes had been excited;—if he feels that he has not benefitted others as he had earnestly desired, this is precisely the moment to benefit himself, and is perhaps permitted for that very end. Where his usefulness has been obviously great, the true Christian will be humbled by the recollection that he is only an instrument. Where it has been less, the defeat of his hopes offers the best occasion, which he will not fail to use for improving his humility. Thus he may always be assured that good has been done somewhere, so that in any case his labour will not have been vain in the Lord.

CHAP. XVII.

TRUE AND FALSE ZEAL.

It is one of the most important ends of cultivating that self-knowledge which we have elsewhere recommended, to discover what is the real bent of our mind, and which are the strongest tendencies of our character; to discover where our disposition requires restraint, and where we may be safely trusted with some liberty of indulgence. If the temper be fervid, and that fervour be happily directed to religion, the most consummate prudence will be requisite to restrain its excesses without freezing its energies.

If, on the contrary, timidity and diffidence be the natural propensity, we shall be in danger of falling into coldness and inactivity with regard to ourselves, and into too unresisting a compliance with the requisitions, or too easy a conformity with the habits of others. It will therefore be an evident proof of christian self-government, when the man of too ardent zeal restrains its outward expression where it would be unseasonable or unsafe; while it will evince the same christian self-denial in the fearful and diffident character, to burst the fetters of timidity, where duty requires a holy boldness; and when he is called upon to lose all lesser fears in the fear of God.

It will then be one of the first objects of a christian to get his understanding and his conscience thoroughly enlightened; to take an exact survey not only of the whole comprehensive scheme of Christianity, but of his own character; to discover, in order to

correct, the defects in his judgment, and to ascertain the deficiencies even of his best qualities. Through ignorance in these respects, though he may really be following up some good tendency, though he is even persuaded that he is not wrong either in his motive or his object, he may yet be wrong in the measure, wrong in the mode, wrong in the application, though right in the principle. He must therefore watch with a suspicious eye over his better qualities, and guard his very virtues from deviation and excess.

His zeal, that indispensable ingredient in the composition of a great character, that quality, without which no great eminence either secular or religious has ever been attained; which is essential to the acquisition of excellence in arts and arms, in learning and piety; that principle without which no man will be able to reach the perfection of his nature, or to animate others to aim at that perfection, will yet hardly fail to mislead the animated Christian, if his knowledge of what is right and just, if his judgment in the application of that knowledge do not keep pace with the principle itself.

Zeal, indeed, is not so much an individual virtue, as the principle which gives life and colouring, as the spirit which gives grace and benignity, as the temper which gives warmth and energy to every other. It is that feeling which exalts the relish of every duty, and sheds a lustre on the practice of every virtue; which, embellishing every image of the mind with its glowing tints, animates every quality of the heart with its invigorating motion. It may be said of zeal among the virtues as of memory among the faculties, that though it singly never made a great man, yet no man has ever made himself conspicuously great where it has been wanting.

Many things however must concur before we can be allowed to determine whether zeal be really a virtue or a vice. Those who are contending for the one or the other, will be in the situation of the two knights, who meeting on a cross road, were on the point of fighting about the colour of a cross which was suspended between them. One insisted it was gold; the other maintained it was silver. The duel was prevented by the interference of a passenger, who desired them to change their positions. Both crossed over to the opposite side, found the cross was gold on one side, and silver on the other. Each acknowledged his opponent to be right.

It may be disputed whether fire be a good or an evil. The man who feels himself cheered by its kindly warmth, is assured that it is a benefit, but he whose house it has just burnt down will give another verdict. Not only the cause, therefore, in which zeal is exerted must be good, but the principle itself must be under due regulation: or, like the rapidity of the traveller who gets into a wrong road, it will only carry him so much the further out of his way; or if he be in the right road, it will, through inattention, carry him involuntarily beyond his destined point. That degree of motion is equally misleading, which detains us short of our end, or which pushes us beyond it.

The apostle suggests a useful precaution by expressly asserting that it is 'in a good cause,' that we 'must be zealously affected;' which implies this further truth, that where the cause is not good, the mischief is proportioned to the zeal. But lest we should carry our limitations of the quality to any restriction of the seasons for exercising it, he takes

care to animate us to its perpetual exercise, by adding that we must be *always* so affected.

If the injustice, the intolerance and persecution, with which a misguided zeal has so often afflicted the church of Christ, in its more early periods, be lamented as a deplorable evil; yet the overruling wisdom of Providence educing good from evil, made the very calamities which false zeal occasioned, the instruments of producing that true and lively zeal to which we owe the glorious band of martyrs and confessors, those brightest ornaments of the best periods of the church. This effect, though a clear vindication of that divine goodness which suffers evil, is no apology for him who perpetrates it.

It is curious to observe the contrary operations of true and false zeal, which though apparently only different modifications of the same quality, are, when brought into contact, repugnant, and even destructive to each other. There is no attribute of the human mind where the different effects of the same principle have such a total opposition: for is it not obvious that the same principle under another direction, which actuates the tyrant in dragging the martyr to the stake, enables the martyr to embrace it?

As a striking proof that the necessity for caution is not imaginary, it has been observed that the Holy Scriptures record more instances of a bad zeal than of a good one. This furnishes the most authoritative argument for regulating this impetuous principle, and for governing it by all those restrictions which a feeling so calculated for good and so capable of evil demands.

It was zeal, but of a blind and furious character, which produced the massacre on the day of St. Bartholomew;—a day to which the mournful strains of

Job have been so well applied.—'Let that day perish. Let it not be joined to the days of the year. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it.'—It was a zeal the most bloody, combined with a perfidy the most detestable, which inflamed the execrable Florentine,* when, having on this occasion invited so many illustrious protestants to Paris under the alluring mask of a public festivity, she contrived to involve her guest, the pious queen of Navarre, and the venerable Coligni in the general mass of undistinguished destruction. The royal and pontifical assassins not satisfied with the sin, converted it into a triumph.—Medals were struck in honour of a deed which has no parallel even in the annals of Pagan persecution.

Even glory did not content the pernicious plotters of this direful tragedy. Devotion was called in to be

The crown and consummation of their crime.

The blackest hypocrisy was made use of to sanctify the foulest murder. The iniquity could not be complete without solemnly thanking God for its success. The pope and cardinals proceeded to St. Mark's church, where they praised the Almighty for so great a blessing conferred on the see of Rome, and the christian world. A solemn jubilee completed the preposterous mummery.—This zeal of devotion was as much worse than even the zeal of murder, as thanking God for enabling us to commit a sin is worse than the commission itself. A wicked piety is still more disgusting than a wicked act. God is less offended by the sin itself than by the thank-offering of its perpetrators. It looks like a black attempt to involve the Creator in the crime.†

* Catherine de Medici.

† See Thuanus for a most affecting and exact account of this direful massacre.

It was this exterminating zeal which made the fourteenth Louis, bad in the profligacy of his youth, worse in the superstition of his age, revoke the tolerating edict which might have drawn down a blessing on his kingdom.—One species of crime was called on, in his days of blind devotion, to expiate another committed in his days of mad ambition. But the expiation was even more intolerable than the offence. The havoc made by the sword of civil persecution was a miserable atonement for the blood which unjust aggression had shed in foreign wars.

It was this impious and cruel zeal which inspired the monk Dominick, in erecting the most infernal tribunal which ever inventive bigotry projected to dishonour the Christian name, and with which pertinacious barbarity has continued for above six centuries, to afflict the human race.

For a complete contrast to this pernicious zeal we need not, blessed be God, travel back into remote history, nor abroad into distant realms. This happy land of civil and religious liberty can furnish a countless catalogue of instances of a pure, a wise, and a well directed zeal. Not to swell the list, we will only mention that it has in our own age, produced the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the abolition of the African slave trade.—Three as noble, and which will, we trust, be as lasting monuments as ever national virtue erected to true piety. These are institutions which bear the genuine stamp of Christianity, not originating in party, founded in disinterestedness, and comprehending the best interests of almost the whole habitable globe,—'without partiality and without hypocrisy.'

Why we hear so much in praise of zeal from a certain class of religious characters, is partly owing to their having taken up a notion, that its required exertions relate to the care of other people's salvation rather than to their own; and indeed the casual prying into a neighbour's house, though much more entertaining, is not near so troublesome as the constant inspection of one's own. It is observable that the outcry against zeal among the irreligious is raised on nearly the same ground, as the clamour in its favour by these professors of religion. The former suspect that the zeal of the religionist evaporates in censuring *their* impiety, and in eagerness for *their* conversion, instead of being directed to themselves. This supposed anxiety they resent, and give a practical proof of their resentment by resolving not to profit by it.

Two very erroneous opinions exist, respecting zeal. It is commonly supposed to indicate a want of charity, and the two principles are accused of maintaining separate interests. This is so far from being the case, that charity is the firm associate of that zeal of which it is suspected to be the enemy. Indeed, this is so infallible a criterion by which to try its sincerity, that we should be apt to suspect the legitimacy of the zeal which is unaccompanied by this fair ally.

Another opinion equally erroneous is not a little prevalent—that where there is much zeal there is little or no prudence. Now a sound and sober zeal is not such an idiot as to neglect to provide for its own success; and would that success be provided for, without employing for its accomplishment, every precaution which prudence can suggest? True zeal, therefore, will be as discreet as it is fervent,

well knowing that its warmest efforts will be neither effectual, nor lasting, without those provisions which discretion alone can make. No quality is ever possessed in perfection where its opposite is wanting; zeal is not Christian fervour, but animal heat, if not associated with charity and prudence.

Zeal indeed, like other good things, is frequently calumniated because it is not understood; and it may sometimes deserve censure, as being the effervescence of that weak but well meaning mind which will defeat the efforts not only of this, but of every other good propensity.

That most valuable faculty therefore of intellectual man, the judgment, the enlightened, impartial, unbiassed judgment, must be kept in perpetual activity, not only in order to ascertain that the cause be good, but to determine also the degree of its importance in any given case, that we may not blindly assign an undue value to an inferior good: for want of this discrimination we may be fighting a windmill, when we fancy we are attacking a fort. We must prove not only whether the thing contended for be right, but whether it be essential; whether in our eagerness to attain this subordinate good we may not be sacrificing, or neglecting, things of more real consequence. Whether the value we assign to it may not be even imaginary.

Above all, we should examine whether we do not contend for it chiefly because it happens to fall in with our own humour, or our own party, more than on account of its intrinsic worth; whether we do not wish to distinguish ourselves by our pertinacity, and to append ourselves to the party rather than to the principle; and thus, as popularity is often gained by the worst part of a man's char-

acter, whether we do not principally persist from the hope of becoming popular. The favourite adage that *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*, might serve as an appropriate motto to one half of the contentions which divide and distract the world.

This zeal, hotly exercised for mere circumstantials, for ceremonies different in themselves, for distinctions rather than differences, has unhappily assisted in causing irreparable separations and dissentions in the christian world, even where the champions on both sides were great and good men. Many of the points which have been the sources of altercation were not worth insisting upon, where the opponents agreed in the grand fundamentals of faith and practice.

But to consider zeal as a general question, as a thing of every day experience.—He whose piety is most sincere will be likely to be the most zealous. But though zeal is an indication, and even a concomitant of sincerity, a burning zeal is sometimes seen where the sincerity is somewhat questionable.

For where zeal is generated by ignorance it is commonly fostered by self-will That which we have embraced through false judgment we maintain through false honour. Pride is generally called in to nurse the offspring of error. It is from this confederacy that we frequently see those who are perversely zealous for points which can add nothing to the cause of christian truth, whether they are rejected or retained, cold and indifferent about the great things which involve the salvation of man.

Though all momentous truths, all indispensable duties, are, in the luminous volume of inspiration, made so obvious that those may read who run; the

contested matters are not only so comparatively little as to be by no means worthy of the heat they excite, but are rendered so doubtful, not in themselves, but by the opposite systems built on them, that he who fights for them is not always sure whether he be right or not; and if he carry his point he can make no moral use of his victory. This indeed is not his concern. It is enough that he has conquered. The importance of the object having never depended on its worth, but on the opinion of his right to maintain that worth.

The gospel assigns very different degrees of importance to allowed practices and commanded duties. It by no means censures those who were rigorous in their payment of the most inconsiderable tythes; but seeing this duty was not only put in competition with, but preferred before, the most important duties, even judgment, mercy and faith, the flagrant hypocrisy was pointedly censured by MEEKNESS itself.

This opposition of a scrupulous exactness in paying the petty demand on three paltry herbs, to the neglect of the three cardinal christian virtues, exhibits as complete and instructive a specimen of that frivolous and false zeal which, evaporating in trifles, wholly overlooks those grand points on which hangs eternal life, as can be conceived.

This passage serves to corroborate a striking fact, that there is scarcely in scripture any precept enforced, which has not some actual exemplification attached to it. The historical parts of the Bible, therefore, are of inestimable value, were it only on this single ground, that the appended truths and principles so abundantly scattered through them, are in general so happily illustrated by them. They are

not dry aphorisms and cold propositions, which stand singly, and disconnected, but truths suggested by the event, but precepts growing out of the occasion. The recollection of the principles recalls to the mind the instructive story which they enrich, while the remembrance of the circumstance impresses the sentiment upon the heart. Thus the doctrine, like a precious gem, is at once preserved and embellished by the narrative being made a frame in which to enshrine it.

True zeal will first exercise itself in earnest desires, in increasing ardour to obtain higher degrees of illumination in our own minds; in fervent prayer that this growing light may operate to the improvement of our practice, that the influences of divine grace may become more outwardly perceptible by the increasing correctness of our habits; that every holy affection may be followed by its correspondent act, whether of obedience or of resignation, of doing, or of suffering.

But the effects of a genuine and enlightened zeal will not stop here. It will be visible in our discourse with those to whom we may have a probability of being useful. But though we should not confine the exercise of our zeal to our conversation, nor our attention to the opinions and practices of others, yet this, when not done with a bustling kind of interference, and offensive forwardness, is proper and useful. It is indeed a natural effect of zeal to appear where it exits, as a fire which really burns will not be prevented from emitting both light and heat; yet we should labour principally to keep up in our own minds the pious feelings which religion has excited there. The brightest flame will decay if no means are used to keep it alive. Pure zeal will

cherish every holy affection, and by increasing every pious disposition will animate us to every duty. It will add new force to our hatred of sin, fresh contrition to our repentance, additional vigour to our resolutions, and will impart augmented energy to every virtue. It will give life to our devotions, and spirit to all our actions.

When a true zeal has fixed these right affections in our own hearts, the same principle will, as we have already observed, make us earnest to excite them in others. No good man wishes to go to heaven alone, and none ever wished others to go thither without earnestly endeavouring to awaken right affections in them. That will be a false zeal which does not begin with the regulation of our own hearts. That will be an illiberal zeal which stops where it begins. A true zeal will extend itself through the whole sphere of its possessor's influence. Christian zeal like christian charity will begin at home, but neither the one nor the other must end there.

But that we must not confine our zeal to mere conversation is not only implied but expressed in scripture. The apostle does not exhort us to be zealous only of good *words* but of good *works*. True zeal ever produces true benevolence. It would extend the blessings which we ourselves enjoy, to the whole human race. It will consequently stir us up to exert all our influence to the extension of religion, to the advancement of every well concerted and well conducted plan, calculated to enlarge the limits of human happiness, and more especially to promote the eternal interests of human kind.

But if we do not first strenuously labour for our own illumination, how shall we presume to enlighten others! It is a dangerous presumption, to busy ourselves in improving others, before we have diligently sought our own improvement. Yet it is a vanity not uncommon that the first feelings, be they true or false, which resemble devotion, the first faint ray of knowledge which has imperfectly dawned, excites in certain raw minds an eager impatience to communicate to others what they themselves have not yet attained. Hence the novel swarms of uninstructed instructors, of teachers who have had no time to learn The act previous to the imparting knowledge should seem to be that of acquiring it. Nothing would so effectually check an irregular, and improve a temperate zeal, as the personal discipline, the self-acquaintance which we have so repeatedly recommended.

True christian zeal will always be known by its distinguishing and inseparable properties. It will be warm indeed, not from temperament but principle. It will be humble, or it will not be *christian* zeal.—It will restrain its impetuosity that it may the more effectually promote its object.—It will be temperate, softening what is strong in the act by gentleness in the manner. It will be tolerating, willing to grant what it would itself desire.—It will be forbearing, in the hope that the offence it censures may be an occasional failing, and not a habit of the mind.—It will be candid, making a tender allowance for those imperfections which beings, fallible themselves, ought to expect from human infirmity.—It will be reasonable—employing fair argument and affectionate remonstrance, instead of

irritating by the adoption of violence, instead of mortifying by the assumption of superiority.

He, who in private society allows himself in violent anger, or unhallowed bitterness, or acrimonious railing, in reprehending the faults of another, might, did his power keep pace with his inclination, have recourse to other weapons. He would probably banish and burn, confiscate and imprison, and think then as he thinks now, that he is doing God service.

If there be any quality which demands a clearer sight, a tighter rein, a stricter watchfulness than another, zeal is that quality. The heart where it is wanting has no elevation; where it is not guarded, no security. The prudence with which it is exercised is the surest evidence of its integrity; for if intemperate, it not only raises enemies to ourselves but to God. It augments the natural enmity to religion instead of increasing her friends.

But if tempered by charity, if blended with benevolence, if sweetened by kindness, if evinced to be honest by its influence on your own conduct, and gentle by its effect on your manners, it may lead your irreligious acquaintance to inquire more closely in what consists the distinction between them and you. You will already by this mildness have won their affections. Your next step may be to gain over their judgment. They may be led to examine what solid grounds of difference subsists between you and them. What substantial reason you have for not going their lengths. What sound argument they can offer for not going yours.

But it may possibly be asked, after all, where do we perceive any symptoms of this inflammatory distemper? Should not the prevalence, or at leas

the existence of a disease be ascertained previous to the application of the remedy? That it exists is sufficiently obvious, though it must be confessed that among the higher ranks it has not hitherto spread very widely; nor is its progress likely to be very alarming, or its effects very malignant. It is to be lamented that in every rank indeed, coldness and indifference, carelessness and neglect, are the reigning epidemics. These are diseases far more difficult of cure; diseases not more dangerous to the patient than distressing to the physician, who generally finds it more difficult to raise a sluggish habit than to lower an occasional heat. The imprudently zealous man, if he be sincere, may, by a discreet regimen, be brought to a state of complete sanity; but to rouse from a state of morbid indifference, to brace from a total relaxation of the system, must be the immediate work of the great Physician of souls; of him who can effect even this, by his spirit accompanying this powerful word, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'

CHAP. XVIII.

INSENSIBILITY TO ETERNAL THINGS.

INSENSIBILITY to eternal things, in beings who are standing on the brink of eternity, is a madness which would be reckoned among prodigies, if it were not so common. It would be altogether incredible, if the numberless instances we have of it

were only related, and not witnessed, were only heard of, and not experienced.

If we had a certain prospect of a great estate, and a splendid mansion which we knew must be ours in a few days; and not only ours as a bequest, but an inheritance; not only as a possession, but a perpetuity; if, in the mean time, we rented, on a precarious lease, a paltry cottage in bad repair, ready to fall, and from which we knew we must at all events soon be turned out, depending on the proprietor's will, whether the ejectment might not be the next minute; would it argue wisdom or even common sense, totally to overlook our near and noble reversion, and to be so fondly attached to our falling tenement, as to spend great part of our time and thoughts in supporting its ruins by props, and concealing its decays by decorations? To be so absorbed in the little sordid pleasures of this frail abode, as not even to cultivate a taste for the delights of the mansion, where such treasures are laid up for us, and on the possession of which we fully reckon in spite of our neglect,—this is an excess of inconsideration, which must be seen to be credited.

It is a striking fact, that the acknowledged uncertainty of life drives worldly men to make sure of every thing depending on it, except their eternal concerns. It leads them to be regular in their accounts, and exact in their bargains. They are afraid of risking ever so little property, on so precarious a tenure as life, without ensuring a reversion. There are even some who speculate on the uncertainty of life as a trade. Strange, that this accurate calculation of the duration of life should not involve a serious attention to its end! Strange, that the critica annuitant should totally overlook his perpetuity!

Strange, that in the prudent care not to risk a fraction of property, equal care should not be taken, not to risk eternal salvation!

We are not supposing flagitious characters, remarkable for any thing which the world calls wicked; we are not supposing their wealth obtained by injustice, or increased by oppression. We are only supposing a soul drawn aside from God, by the alluring baits of a world, which, like the treacherous lover of Atalanta, causes him to lose the victory by throwing golden apples in his way. The shining baits are obtained, but the race is lost!

To worldly men of a graver cast, business may be as formidable an enemy as pleasure is to those of a lighter turn: Business has so sober an air that it looks like virtue, and virtuous it certainly is, when carried on in a proper spirit, with due moderation, and in the fear of God. To have a lawful employment, and to pursue it with diligence, is not only right and honourable in itself, but is one of the best preservatives from temptation.*

When a man pleads in his favour, the diligence business demands, the self-denying practices it imposes, the patience, the regularity, the industry indispensable to its success; when he argues that these are habits of virtue, that they are a daily discipline to the moral man; and that the world could not subsist without business, he argues justly;—but when he forgets his interests in the eternal world, when he neglects to lay up a treasure in heaven, in

* That accurate judge of human life, Dr. Johnson, has often been heard by the writer of these pages to observe, that it was the greatest misfortune which could befall a man to have been bred to no profession, and pathetically to regret that this misfortune was his own.

order that he may augment a store which he does not want, and, perhaps, does not intend to use, or uses to purposes merely secular, he is a bad calculator of the relative value of things.

Business has an honourable aspect as being opposed to idleness, the most hopeless offspring of the whole progeny of sin. The man of business comparing himself with the man of dissipation, feels a fair and natural consciousness of his own value, and of the superiority of his own pursuits. But it is by comparison that we deceive ourselves to our ruin. Business, whether professional, commercial, or political, endangers minds of a better cast, minds which look down on pleasure as beneath a thinking being. But if business absorb the affections, if it swallow up time, to the neglect of eternity; if it generate a worldly spirit; if it cherish covetousness; if it engage the mind in long views, and ambitious pursuits, it may be as dangerous, as its more inconsiderate and frivolous rival. The grand evil of both lies in the alienation of the heart from God. Nay, in one respect, the danger is greater to him who is the best employed. The man of pleasure, however thoughtless, can never make himself believe that he is doing right. The man plunged in the serious bustle of business, cannot easily persuade himself that he may be doing wrong.

Commutation, compensation, and substitution, are the grand engines which WORLDLY RELIGION incessantly keeps in play. Her's is a life of barter, a state of spiritual traffic, so much indulgence for so many good works. The implication is, 'we have a rigorous master,' and it is but fair to indemnify ourselves for the severity of his requisitions; just as an overworked servant steals a holyday. 'These

persons,' says an eminent writer,* 'maintain a *meum* and *tuum* with heaven itself.' They set bounds to God's prerogative, lest it should too much encroach on man's privilege.

We have elsewhere observed, that if we invite people to embrace religion on the mere mercenary ground of present pleasure, they will desert it as soon as they find themselves disappointed. Men are too ready to clamour for the pleasures of piety, before they have, I dare not say entitled themselves to them, but put themselves into the way of receiving them. We should be angry at that servant, who made the receiving of his wages a preliminary to the performance of his work. This is not meant to establish the merit of works, but the necessity of our seeking that transforming and purifying change which characterizes the real christian; instead of complaining that we do not possess those consolations, which can be consequent only on such a mutation of the mind.

But if men consider this world on the true scripture ground, as a state of probation; if they consider religion as a school for happiness indeed, but of which the consummation is only to be enjoyed in heaven, the christian hope will support them; the christian faith will strengthen them. They will serve diligently, wait patiently, love cordially, obey faithfully, and be steadfast under all trials, sustained by the cheering promise held out to him 'who endures to the end.'

There are certain characters who seem to have a graduated scale of vices. Of this scale they keep clear of the lowest degrees and to rise above the

* The learned and pious John Smith.

highest they are not ambitious, forgetful that the same principle which operates in the greater, operates also in the less. A life of incessent gratification does not alarm the conscience, yet it is equally unfavourable to religion, equally destructive of its principle, equally opposite to its spirit, with more obvious vices.

These are the habits which, by relaxing the mind and dissolving the heart, particularly foster indifference to our spiritual state and insensibility to the things of eternity. A life of voluptuousness, if it be not a life of actual sin, is a disqualification for holiness, for happiness, for heaven. It not only alienates the heart from God, but lays it open to every temptation to which natural temper may invite, or incidental circumstances allure. The worst passions lie dormant in hearts given up to selfish indulgences, always ready to start into action as occasion calls.

Voluptuousness and irreligion play into each other's hands: they are reciprocally cause and effect. The looseness of the principle confirms the carelessness of the conduct, while the negligent conduct in its own vindication shelters itself under the supposed security of unbelief. The instance of the rich man in the parable of Lazarus, strikingly illustrates this truth.

Whoever doubts that a life of sensuality is consistent with the most unfeeling barbarity to the wants and sufferings of others; whoever doubts that boundless expense and magnificence, the means of procuring which were wrung from the robbery and murder of a lacerated world, may not be associated with that robbery and murder,—let him turn to the gorgeous festivities and unparalleled pageantries of

Versailles and Saint Cloud.—There the Imperial Harlequin, from acting the deepest and the longest tragedy that ever drew tears of blood from an audience composed of the whole civilized globe, by a sudden stroke of his magic wand, shifts the scene to the most prepostrous pantomime:—

> Where moody madness laughing wild
> Amidst severest wo,

gloomily contemplates the incongruous spectacle, sees the records of the Tyburn Chronicle embellished with the wanton splendours of the Arabian tables; beholds

> Perverse all monstrous, all prodigious things;

beholds tyranny with his painted vizor of patriotism, and polygamy with her Janus face of political conscience and counterfeit affection fill the fore ground; while sceptered parasites, and pinchbeck potentates, tricked ou with the shining spoils of plundered empires, an decked with the pilfered crowns of deposed and exiled monarchs, fill and empty the changing scene, with ' exits and with entrances,' as fleeting and unsubstantial as the progeny of Banquo,—beholds inventive but fruitless art, solicitously decorate the ample stage to conceal the stains of blood—stains as indelible as those which the ambitious wife of the irresolute thane vainly strove to wash from her polluted hands; while in her sleeping delirium she continued to cry,

> Still here's the smell of blood;
> The perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten it.

But to return to the general question. Let us not inquire whether these unfeeling tempers and selfish habits offend society, and discredit us with the world; but whether they feed our corruptions and put us in a posture unfavourable to all interior improvement; whether they offend God and endanger the soul; whether the gratification of self is the life which the Redeemer taught or lived; whether sensuality is a suitable preparation for that state where God himself, who is a spirit, will constitute all the happiness of spiritual beings.

But these are not the only, perhaps not the greatest dangers. The intellectual vices, the spiritual offences may destroy the soul without much injuring the credit. These have not, like voluptuousness, their seasons of alternation and repose. Here the principle is in continual operation. Envy has no interval. Ambition never cools. Pride never sleeps. The principle at least is always awake. An intemperate man is sometimes sober, but a proud man is never humble. Where vanity reigns, she reigns always. These interior sins are more difficult of extirpation, they are less easy of detection, more hard to come at; and, as the citadel sometimes holds out after the outworks are taken, these sins of the heart are the latest conquered in the moral warfare.

Here lies the distinction between the worldly and the religious man. It is alarm enough for the christian that he feels any propensities to vice. Against these propensities he watches, strives and prays: and though he is thankful for the victory when he has resisted the temptation, he can feel no elation of heart while conscious of inward dispositions, which nothing but divine grace enables him to keep from

breaking out into a flame. He feels that there is no way to obtain the pardon of sin but to leave off sinning: he feels that though repentance is not a Saviour, yet that there can be no salvation where there is no repentance. Above all, he knows that the promise of remission of sin by the death of Christ is the only solid ground of comfort. However correct his present life may be, the weight of past offences would hang so heavy on his conscience, that without the atoning blood of his Redeemer, despair of pardon for the past would leave him hopeless. He would continue to sin, as an extravagant bankrupt who can get no acquittal, would continue to be extravagant, because no present frugality could redeem his former debts.

It is sometimes pleaded that the labour attached to persons in high public stations and important employments, by leaving them no time, furnishes a reasonable excuse for the omission of their religious duties. These apologies are never offered for any such neglect in the poor man, though to him every day brings the inevitable return of his twelve hour's labour, without intermission and without mitigation.

But surely the more important the station, the higher and wider the sphere of action, the more imperious is the call for religion, not only in the way of example, but even in the way of success; if it be indeed granted that there is such a thing as divine influences, if it be allowed that God has a blessing to bestow. If the ordinary man who has only himself to govern, requires that aid, how urgent is *his* necessity who has to govern millions! What an awful idea, could we even suppose it realized, that the weight of a nation might rest on the

head of him whose heart looks not up for a higher support!

Were we alluding to sovereigns, and not to statesmen, we need not look beyond the throne of Great Britain, for the instance of a monarch who has never made the cares attendant on a king, an excuse for neglecting his duty to the King of kings.

The politician, the warrior, and the orator, find it peculiarly hard to renounce in themselves that wisdom and strength, to which they believe that the rest of the world are looking up. The man of station or of genius, when invited to the self-denying duties of christianity, as well as he who has 'great possessions,' goes away 'sorrowing.'

But to know that they must end, stamps vanity on all the glories of life; to know that they must end soon, stamps infatuation, not only on him who sacrifices his conscience for their acquisition, but on him who, though upright in the discharge of his duties, discharges them without any referrence to God.—Would the conqueror or the orator reflect when the 'laurel crown is placed on his brow, how soon it will be followed by the cypress wreath,' it would lower the delirium of ambition; it would cool the intoxication of prosperity.

There is a general kind of belief in christianity, prevalent among men of the world, which, by soothing the conscience, prevents self-inquiry. That the holy scriptures contain the will of God, they do not question; that they contain the best system of morals, they frequently assert: but that they do not feel the necessity of acquiring a correct notion of the doctrines those scriptures involve. The depravity of man, the atonement made by Christ, the assistance of the Holy Spirit—these they consider as

the metaphysical part of religion, into which it is not of much importance to enter, and by a species of self-flattery, they satisfy themselves with an idea of acceptableness with their Maker, as a state to be attained without the humility, faith, and newness of life which they require, and which are indeed their proper concomitants.

A man absorbed in a multitude of secular concerns, decent but unawakened, listens with a kind of respectful insensibility, to the overtures of religion. He considers the church as venerable from her antiquity, and important from her connexion with the state. No one is more alive to her political, nor more dead to her spiritual importance. He is anxious for her existence, but indifferent to her doctrines. These he considers as a general matter, in which he has no individual concern. He considers religious observances as something decorous but unreal; as a grave custom made respectable by public usage, and long prescription. He admits that the poor who have little to enjoy, and the idle who have little to do, cannot do better than make over to God that time which cannot be turned to a more profitable account. Religion, he thinks, may properly enough employ leisure, and occupy old age. But though both advance towards himself with no imperceptible step, he is still at a loss to determine the precise period when the leisure is sufficient, or the age enough advanced. It recedes as the destined season approaches. He continues to intend moving, but he continues to stand still.

Compare his drowsy Sabbaths with the animation of the days of business, you would not think it was the same man. The one are to be got over, the others are enjoyed. He goes from the dull decen-

cies, the shadowy forms—for such they are to him, of public worship, to the solid realities of his worldly concerns, to the cheerful activities of secular life. These he considers as bounden, almost as exclusive duties. The others indeed may not be wrong, but these he is sure are right. The world is his element. Here he breathes freely his native air. Here he is substantially engaged. Here his whole mind is alive, his understanding broad awake, all his energies are in full play; his mind is all alacrity; his faculties are employed, his capacities are filled; here they have an object worthy of their widest expansion. Here his desires and affections are absorbed. The faint impression of the Sunday's sermon fades away, to be as faintly revived on the Sunday following, again to fade in the succeeding week. To the sermon he brings a formal ceremonious attendance; to the world he brings all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. To the one he resorts in conformity to law and custom; to induce him to resort to the other, he wants no law, no sanction, no invitation, no argument. His will is of the party. His passions are volunteers. The invisible things of heaven are clouded in shadow, are lost in distance. The world is lord of the ascendant. Riches, honours, power fill his mind with brilliant images. They are present, they are certain, they are tangible. They assume form and bulk. In these therefore he cannot be mistaken; in the others he may. The eagerness of competition, the struggle for superiority, the perturbations of ambition, fill his mind with an emotion, his soul with an agitation, his affections with an interest, which, though very unlike happiness, he yet flatters himself is the road to it. This factitious pleasure, this tumultuous feeling, produces

at least that negative satisfaction of which he is constantly in search—it keeps him from himself.

Even in circumstances where there is no success to prevent a very tempting bait, the mere occupation, the crowd of objects, the succession of engagements, the mingling pursuits, the very tumult and hurry have their gratifications. The bustle gives false peace by leaving no leisure for reflection. He lays his conscience asleep with the 'flattering unction' of good intentions. He comforts himself with the creditable pretence of want of time, and the vague resolution of giving up to God the dregs of that life, of the vigorous season of which he thinks the world more worthy. Thus commuting with his Maker, life wears away, its close draws near—and even the poor commutation which was promised is not made. The assigned hour of retreat either never arrives, or if it does arrive, sloth and sensuality are resorted to, as the fair reward of a life of labour and anxiety; and whether he dies in the protracted pursuit of wealth, or in the enjoyment of the luxuries it has earned, he dies in the trammels of the world.

If we do not cordially desire to be delivered from the dominion of these worldly tempers, it is because we do not believe in the condemnation annexed to their indulgence. We may indeed believe it as we believe any other general proposition, or any indifferent fact; but not as a truth in which we have a personal concern; not as a danger which has any reference to *us*. We evince this practical unbelief in the most unequivocal way, by thinking so much more about the most frivolous concern in which we are assured we have an interest, than about this most important of all concerns.

Indifference to eternal things, instead of tranquillizing the mind, as it professes to do, is, when a thoughtful moment occurs, a fresh subject of uneasiness; because it adds to our peril the horror of not knowing it. If shutting our eyes to a danger would prevent it, to shut them would not only be a happiness but a duty; but to barter eternal safety for momentary ease, is a wretched compromise. To produce this delusion, mere inconsideration is as efficient a cause as the most prominent sin. The reason why we do not value eternal things is, because we do not think of them. The mind is so full of what is present, that is has no room to admit a thought of what is to come. Not only we do not give that attention to a never-dying soul which prudent men give to a common transaction, but we do not even think it worth the care which inconsiderate men give to an inconsiderable one. We complain that life is short, and yet throw away the best part of it, only making over to religion that portion which is good for nothing else; life would be long enough if we assigned its best period to its best purpose.

Say not that the requisitions of religion are severe, ask rather if they are necessary. If a thing must absolutely be done, if eternal misery will be incurred by not doing it, it is fruitless to inquire whether it be hard or easy. Inquire only whether it be indispensable, whether it be commanded, whether it be practicable. It is a well known axiom in science, that difficulties are of no weight against demonstrations. The duty on which our eternal state depends, is not a thing to be debated, but done. The duty which is too imperative to be evaded, too important to be neglected, is not to be

argued about, but performed. To sin on quietly, because you do not intend to sin always, is to live on a reversion which will probably never be yours.

It is folly to say that religion drives men to despair; when it only teaches them by a salutary fear to avoid destruction. The fear of God differs from all other fear, for it is accompanied with trust, and confidence, and love. 'Blessed is the man that feareth alway,' is no paradox to him who entertains this holy fear. It sets him above the fear of ordinary troubles. It fills his heart. He is not discomposed with those inferior apprehensions which unsettle the soul and unhinge the peace of worldly men. His mind is occupied with one grand concern, and is therefore less liable to be shaken than little minds which are filled with little things. Can that principle lead to despair, which proclaims the mercy of God in Christ Jesus to be greater than all the sins of all the men in the world?

If *despair* then prevent your return, add not to your list of offences that of doubting of the forgiveness which is sincerely implored. You have already wronged God in his holiness, wrong him not in his mercy. You may offend him more by despairing of his pardon than by all the sins which have made that pardon necessary. Repentance, if one may venture the bold remark, almost disarms God of the power to punish. Hear his style and title as proclaimed by himself;—'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty'—that is, those who by unrepented guilt exclude themselves from the offered mercy.

If infidelity or indifference, which is practical infidelity, keep you back, yet, as reasonable beings, ask yourselves a few short questions; 'For what end was I sent into the world? Is my soul immortal? Am I really placed here in a state of trial, or is this span my all? Is there an eternal state? If there be, will the use I make of this life decide on my condition in that? I know that there is death, but is there a judgment?'—

Rest not till you have cleared up, I do not say your own evidences for heaven;—you have much to do before you arrive at that stage—but whether there be any heaven? Ask yourself whether Christianity is not important enough to deserve being inquired into? Whether eternal life is not too valuable to be entirely overlooked? Whether eternal destruction, if a reality, is not worth avoiding?—If you make these interrogations sincerely, you will make them practically.—They will lead you to examine your own personal interest in these things. Evils which are ruining us for want of attention to them, lessen, from the moment our attention to them begins. True or false, the question is worth settling. Vibrate them no longer between doubt and certainty. If the evidence be inadmissible, reject it. But if you can once ascertain these cardinal points, then throw away your time if you *can*, then trifle with eternity of you *dare*.*

* An awakening call to public and individual feelings has been recently made, by an observation of an eloquent speaker in the house of commons. He remarked that himself and the honourable member for Yorkshire, then sitting on a committee appointed on occasion of a great national calamity, were the only surviving members of the committee on a similar occasion twenty-two years ago! The call is the more alarming, because

It is one of the striking characters of the Omnipotent that 'he is strong and patient.' It is a standing evidence of his patience that 'he is provoked every day.' How beautifully do these characters reflect lustre on each other. If he were not strong, his patience would want its distinguishing perfection. If he were not patient, his strength would instantly crush those who provoke him, not sometimes, but often; not every year, but 'every day.'

Oh you, who have a long space given you for repentance; confess that the forbearance of God, when viewed as coupled with his strength, is his most astonishing attribute! Think of the companions of your early life;—if not your associates in actual vice, if not your confederates in guilty pleasures, yet the sharers of your thoughtless meetings, of your convivial revelry, of your worldly schemes, of your ambitious projects—think how many of them have been cut off, perhaps without warning, probably without repentance. *They* have been represented to their Judge; *their* doom, whatever it be, is irreversibly fixed; yours is mercifully suspended. Adore the mercy: embrace the suspension.

Only suppose if they could be permitted to come back to this world, if they could be allowed another period of trial, how would they spend their restored life! How cordial would be their penitence, how intense their devotion, how profound their humility, how holy their actions! Think then that you have

the mortality did not arise from some extraordinary cause, which might not again occur, but was in the common course of human things. Such a proportion of deaths is perpetually taking place, but the very frequency which ought to excite attention prevents it, till it is thus forced on our notice.

still in your power that for which they would give millions of worlds.—' Hell', says a pious writer, ' is truth seen too late.'

In almost every mind there sometimes float indefinite and general purposes of repentance. The operation of these purposes is often repelled by a real, though disavowed scepticism. ' Because sentence is not executed speedily,' they suspect it has never been pronounced. They therefore think they may safely continue to defer their intended but unshapen purpose.—Though they sometimes visit the sick beds of others; though they see how much disease disqualifies for all duties, yet to this period of incapacity, to this moment of disqualification do they continue to defer this tremendously important concern.

What an image of the divine condescension does it convey, that ' the goodness of God leadeth to repentance!' It does not barely invite, but it conducts. Every warning is more or less an invitation; every visitation is a lighter stroke to avert a heavier blow. This was the way in which the heathen world understood portents and prodigies, and on this interpretation of them they acted. Any alarming warning, whether rational or superstitious, drove them to their temples, their sacrifices, their expiations. Does our clearer light always carry us farther? Does it in these instances, always carry us as far as natural conscience carried them?

The final period of the worldly man at length arrives; but he will not believe his danger. Even if he fearfully glance round for an intimation of it in every surrounding face, every face, it is too probable, is in a league to deceive him. What a noble opportunity is now offered to the Christian physi-

cian to show a kindness as far superior to any he has ever shown, as the concerns of the soul are superior to those of the body! Oh let him not fear *prudently* to reveal a truth for which the patient may bless him in eternity! Is it not sometimes to be feared that in the hope of prolonging for a little while the existence of the perishing body, he robs the never-dying soul of its last chance of pardon? Does not the concern for the immortal part united with his care of the afflicted body, bring the medical professor to a nearer imitation than any other supposable situation can do, of that Divine Physician, who never healed the one without manifesting a tender concern for the other?

But the deceit is short, is fruitless. The amazed spirit is about to dislodge. Who shall speak its terror and dismay? Then he cries out in the bitterness of his soul, 'What capacity has a diseased man, what time has a dying man, what disposition has a sinful man to acquire good principles, to unlearn false notions, to renounce bad practices, to establish right habits, to begin to love God, to begin to hate sin? How is the stupendous concern of salvation to be worked out by a mind incompetent to the most ordinary concerns?'

The infinite importance of what he has to do—the goading conviction that it must be done—the utter inability of doing it—the dreadful combination in his mind of both the necessity and incapacity—the despair of crowding the concerns of an age into a moment—the impossibility of beginning a repentance which should have been completed—of setting about a peace which should have been concluded—of suing for a pardon which

should have been obtained;—all these complicated concerns—without strength, without time, without hope, with a clouded memory, a disjointed reason, a wounded spirit, undefined terrors, remembered sins, anticipated punishment, an angry God, an accusing conscience, altogether, intolerably augment the sufferings of a body which stands in little need of the insupportable burthen of a distracted mind to aggravate its torments.

Though we pity the superstitious weakness of the German emperor in acting over the anticipated solemnities of his own funeral—that eccentric act of penitence of a great but perverted mind; it would be well if we were now and then to represent to our minds while in sound health, the solemn certainties of a dying bed; if we were sometimes to image to ourselves this awful scene, not only as inevitable, but as near; if we accustomed ourselves to see things now, as we shall then wish we had seen them. Surely the most sluggish insensibility must be roused by figuring to itself the rapid approach of death, the nearness of our unalterable doom, our instant transition to that state of unutterable bliss or unimaginable wo to which death will in a moment consign us. Such a mental representation would assist us in dissipating the illusion of the senses would help to realize what is invisible, and to approximate what we think remote. It would disenchant us from the world, tear off her painted mask, shrink her pleasures into their proper dimensions, her concerns into their real value, her enjoyments into their just compass, her promises into nothing.

Terrible as the evil is, if it must, and that at no distant day, be met, spare not to present it to your imagination; not to lacerate your feelings but to arm

your resolution; not to excite unprofitable distress, but to strengthen your faith. If it terrify you at first, draw a little nearer to it every time. Familiarity will abate the terror. If you cannot face the image, how will you encounter the reality?

Let us then figure to ourselves the moment (who can say that moment may not be the next?) when all we cling to shall elude our grasp; when every earthly good shall be to us as if it had never been, except in the remembrance of the use we have made of it; when our eyes shall close upon a world of sense, and open on a world of spirits; when there shall be no relief for the fainting body, and no refuge for the parting soul, except that single refuge to which, perhaps, we have never thought of resorting—that refuge which if we have not despised we have too probably neglected—the everlasting mercies of God in Christ Jesus.

Reader! whoever you are, who have neglected to remember that to die is the end for which you were born, know that you have a personal interest in this scene. Turn not away from it in disdain, however feebly it may have been represented. You may escape any other evil of life, but its end you cannot escape. Defer not then its weightiest concern to its weakest period. Begin not the preparation when you should be completing the work. Delay not the business which demands your best faculties to the period of their debility, probably of their extinction. Leave not the work which requires an age to do, to be done in a moment, a moment too which may not be granted. The alternative is tremendous. The difference is that of being saved or lost. It is no light thing to perish!

CHAP. XIX.

HAPPY DEATHS.

FEW circumstances contribute more fatally to confirm in worldly men that insensibility to eternal things which was considered in the preceding chapter, than the boastful accounts we sometimes hear of the firm and heroic death-beds of popular but irreligious characters. Many causes contribute to these *happy deaths* as they are called. The blind are bold, they do not see the precipice they despise.—Or perhaps there is less unwillingness to quit a world which has so often disappointed them, or which they have sucked to the last dregs. They leave life with less reluctance, feeling that they have exhausted all its gratifications.—Or it is a disbelief of the reality of the state on which they are about to enter.—Or it is a desire to be released from excessive pain, a desire naturally felt by those who calculate their gain, rather by what they are escaping from, than by what they are to receive.—Or it is equability of temper, or firmness of nerve, or hardness of mind.—Or it is the arrogant wish to make the last act of life confirm its preceding professions.—Or it is the vanity of perpetuating their philosophic character.—Or if some faint ray of light break in, it is the pride of not retracting the sentiments which from pride they have maintained:—The desire of posthumous renown among their own party; the hope to make their disciples stand firm by their example; the ambition to give their last possible blow to revelation—or perhaps the fear of expressing doubts which might

beget a suspicion that their disbelief was not so sturdy as they would have it thought. Above all, may they not, as a punishment for their long neglect of the warning voice of truth, be given up to a strong delusion to believe the lie they have so often propagated, and really to expect to find in death that eternal sleep, with which they have affected to quiet their own consciences, and have really weakened the faith of others?

Every new instance is an additional buttress on which the sceptical school lean for support, and which they produce as a fresh triumph. With equal satisfaction they collect stories of infirmity, depression, and want of courage in the dying hour of religious men, whom the nature of the disease, timorousness of spirit, profound humility, the sad remembrance of sin, though long repented of and forgiven, a deep sense of the awfulness of meeting God in judgment;—whom some or all of these causes may occasion to depart in trembling fear; in whom, though heaviness may endure through the night of death, yet joy cometh in the morning of the resurrection.

It is a maxim of the civil law that definitions are hazardous. And it cannot be denied that various descriptions of persons have hazarded much in their definitions of a *happy death*. A very able and justly admired writer, who has distinguished himself by the most valuable works on political economy, has recorded, as proofs of the happy death of a no less celebrated contemporary, that he cheerfully amused himself in his last hours with *Lucian*, *a game of whist*, and some good humoured drollery upon *Charon* and his boat.

But may we not venture to say, with 'one of the people called Christians,'* himself a wit and philosopher, though of the school of Christ, that the man who could meet death in such a frame of mind, 'might smile over Babylon in ruins, esteem the earthquake which destroyed Lisbon an agreeable occurrence, and congratulate the hardened Pharoah on his overthrow in the Red Sea.'

This eminent historian and philosopher, whose great intellectual powers it is as impossible not to admire, as not to lament their unhappy misapplication, has been eulogized by his friend, as coming nearer than almost any other man, to the perfection of human nature in his life; and has been almost deified for the cool courage and heroic firmness with which he met death. His eloquent panegyrist, with as insidious an inuendo as has ever been thrown out against revealed religion, goes on to observe, that 'perhaps it is one of the very worst circumstances against Christianity, that very few of its professors were ever either so moral, so humane, or could so philosophically govern their passions, as the sceptical David Hume.'

Yet notwithstanding this rich embalming of so noble a compound of 'matter and motion,' we must be permitted to doubt one of the two things presented for our admiration; we must either doubt the so much boasted happiness of his death, or the so much extolled humanity of his heart. We must be permitted to suspect the soundness of that benevolence, which led him to devote his latest hours to prepare, under the label of *an Essay on Suicide*, a potion for

* The late excellent bishop Horne. See his letters to Dr. Adam Smith.

posterity, of so deleterious a quality, that if taken by the patient, under all the circumstances in which he undertakes to prove it innocent, might have gone near to effect the extinction of the whole human race. For if all rational beings, according to this posthumous prescription, are at liberty to procure their own release from life, 'under pain or sickness, shame or poverty,' how large a portion of the world would be authorized to quit it uncalled! For how many are subject to the two latter grievances; from the two former how few are altogether exempt!*

The energy of that ambition which could concentrate the last efforts of a powerful mind, the last exertions of a spirit greedy of fame, into a project not only for destroying the souls, but for abridging the lives of his fellow creatures, leaves at a disgraceful distance the inverted thirst of glory of the man, who to immortalize his own name, set fire to the Temple at Ephesus. Such a burning zeal to annihilate the eternal hope of his fellow creatures might be philosophy; but surely to authorize them to curtail their moral existence, which to the infidel who looks for no other, must be invaluable, was not philanthropy.

But if this death was thought worthy of being blazoned to the public eye in all the warm and glowing colours with which affection decorates pa-

* Another part of the *Essay on Suicide* has this passage,—'Whenever pain or sorrow so far overcome my patience, as to make me tired of life, I may conclude that I am recalled from my station in the plainest and most express terms.'—And again —'When I fall upon my own sword, I receive my death equally from the hands of the Deity, as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever.'—And again—'Where is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?'

negyric; the disciples of the same school have been in general, anxiously solicitous to produce only the more creditable instances of invincible hardness of heart, while they have laboured to cast an impenetrable veil over the closing scene of those among the less inflexible of the fraternity, who have exhibited in their departing moments, any symptoms of doubt, any indications of distrust, respecting the validity of their principles:—Principles which they had long maintained with so much zeal, and disseminated with so much industry.

In spite of the sedulous anxiety of his satellites to conceal the clouded setting of the great luminary of modern infidelity, from which so many minor stars have filled their little urns, and then set up for original lights themselves; in spite of the pains taken —for we must drop metaphor—to shroud from all eyes, except those of the initiated, the terror and dismay with which the Philosopher of Geneva met death, met his summons to appear before that God whose providence he had ridiculed, that Saviour whose character and offices he had vilified,—the secret was betrayed. In spite of the precautions taken by his associates to bury in congenial darkness the agonies which in his last hours contradicted the audacious blasphemies of a laborious life spent in their propagation, at last, like his great instigator, he *believed and trembled.*

Whatever the sage of Ferney might be in the eyes of Journalists, of Academicians, of Encyclopædists, of the Royal Author of Berlin, of Revolutionists in the egg of his own hatching, of full grown infidels of his own spawning, of a world into which he had been for more than half a century industriously infusing a venom, the effects of which will be

long felt, the expiring philosopher was no object of veneration to his NURSE.—She could have recorded 'a tale to harrrow up the soul,' the horrors of which were sedulously attempted to be consigned to oblivion. But for this woman and a few other unbribed witnesses, his friends would probably have endeavoured to edify the world with this addition to the brilliant catalogue of *happy deaths*.*

It has been a not uncommon opinion that the works of an able and truly pious christian, by their happy tendency to awaken the careless and to convince the unbelieving, may, even for ages after the excellent author is entered into his eternal rest, by the accession of new converts which they bring to christianity, continue to add increasing brightness to the crown of the already glorified saint.—If this be true, How shall imagination presume to conceive, much less how shall language express, what must be expected in the contrary case? How shall we dare turn our thoughts to the progressive torments which may be ever heaping on the heads of those unhappy men of

* It is a well attested fact that this woman, after his decease, being sent for to attend another person in dying circumstances, anxiously inquired if the patient was a gentleman; for that she had recently been so dreadfully terrified in witnessing the dying horrors of Mons. de Voltaire, which surpassed all description, that she had resolved never to attend any other person of that sex unless she could be assured that he was not a philosopher.—Voltaire indeed, as he was deficient in the moral honesty and the other good qualities, which obtained for Mr. Hume the affection of his friends, wanted his sincerity. Of all his other vices, hypocrisy was the consummation. While he daily dishonoured the Redeemer by the invention of unheard of blasphemies; after he had bound himself by a solemn pledge never to rest till he had exterminated his very name from the face of the earth, he was not ashamed to assist regularly at the awful commemoration of his death at the altar!

genius, who have devoted their rare talents to promote vice and infidelity, continue with fatal success to make successive proselytes through successive ages—if their works last so long, and thus accumulate on themselves anguish ever growing, miseries ever multiplying, without hope of any mitigation, without hope of any end!

A more recent instance of the temper and spirit which the College of Infidelity exhibits on these occasions is perhaps less generally known. A person of our own time and country, of high rank and talents, and who ably filled a great public situation, had unhappily in early life, imbibed principles and habits analogous to these of a notoriously profligate society of which he was a member, a society, of which the very appellation it delighted to distinguish itself by, is

Offence and torture to the sober ear.

In the near view of death, at an advanced age, deep remorse and terror took possession of his soul; but he had no friend about him to whom he could communicate the state of his mind, or from whom he could derive either counsel or consolation. One day in the absence of his attendants, he raised his exhausted body on his dying bed, and threw himself on the floor, where he was found in great agony of spirit, with a prayer book in his hand. This detection was at once a subject for ridicule and regret to his colleagues, and he was contemptuously spoken of as a pusillanimous deserter from the *good cause*. The phrase used by them to express their displeasure at his apostacy is too offensive to find a place

here.* Were we called upon to decide between rival horrors, we should feel no hesitation in pronouncing this death a less unhappy one than those to which we have before alluded.

Another well known sceptic, while in perfect health, took measures by a special order, to guard against any intrusion in his last sickness, by which he might, even in the event of delirium, betray any doubtful apprehension that there might be an hereafter; or in any other way be surprised in uttering expressions of terror, and thus exposing the state of his mind, in case any such revolution should take place, which his heart whispered him might possibly happen.

But not only in those *happy deaths* which close a life of avowed impiety, is there great room for suspicion, but even in cases where without acknowledged infidelity, there has been a careless life; when in such cases we hear of a sudden death-bed revolution, of much seeming contrition, succeeded by extraordinary professions of joy and triumph, we should be very cautious of pronouncing on their real state. Let us rather leave the penitent of a day to that mercy against which he has been sinning through a whole life. These 'Clinical Converts,' (to borrow a favourite phrase of the eloquent bishop Taylor,) may indeed be true penitents; but how shall we pronounce them to be so? How can we conclude that 'they are dead unto sin' unless they be spared to 'live unto righteousness?'

Happily we are not called upon to decide. He to whose broad eye the future and the past lie open, as

* The writer had this anecdote from an acquaintance of the noble person at the time of his death.

he has been their constant witness, so will he be their unerring judge.*

But the admirers of certain *happy deaths*, do not even pretend that any such change appeared in the friends of whom they make not so much the panegyric as the apotheosis. They would even think repentance a derogation from the dignity of their character. They pronounce them to have been good enough as they were; insisting that they have a *demand* for happiness upon God, if there be any such Being; a *claim* upon heaven if there be any such place. They are satisfied that their friend, after a life spent 'without God in the world,' without evidencing any marks of a changed heart, without even affecting any thing like repentance, without intimating that there was any call for it, DIED PRONOUNCING HIMSELF HAPPY.

But nothing is more suspicious than a *happy death*, where there has neither been religion in the life nor humility in its close, where its course has been without piety, and its termination without repentance.

Others in a still bolder strain, disdaining the posthumous renown to be conferred by survivers, of

* The primitive church carried their incredulity of the appearances of repentance so far as to require not only years of sorrow for sin, but perseverance in piety, before they would admit offenders to their communion; and as a test of their sincerity, required the uniform practice of those virtues most opposite to their former vices.—Were this made the criterion now, we should not so often hear such flaming accounts of converts, so exultingly reported, before time has been allowed to try their stability. More especially we should not hear of so many triumphant relations of death-bed converts, in whom the symptoms must frequently be too equivocal to admit the positive decision of human wisdom.

their *having* died happily, prudently secure their own fame, and changing both the tense and the person usual in monumental inscriptions, with prophetic confidence record on their own sepulchral marble, that they *shall* die not only 'HAPPY,' but 'GRATEFUL,'—the prescience of philosophy thus assuming as certain what the humble spirit of Christianity only presumes to hope.

There is another reason to be assigned for the charitable error of indiscriminately consigning our departed acquaintance to certain happiness. Affliction, as it is a tender, so it is a misleading feeling; especially in minds naturally soft, and but slightly tinctured with religion. The death of a friend awakens the kindest feelings of the heart. But by exciting true sorrow, it often excites false charity. Grief naturally softens every fault, love as naturally heightens every virtue. It is right and kind to consign error to oblivion, but not to immortality. Charity indeed we owe to the dead as well as to the living, but not that erroneous charity by which truth is violated, and undeserved commendation lavished on those whom truth could no longer injure. To calumniate the dead is even worse than to violate the rights of sepulture; not to vindicate calumniated worth, when it can no longer vindicate itself, is a crime next to that of attacking it;* but on the dead,

* What a generous instance of that disinterested attachment which survives the grave of its object, and piously rescues his reputation from the assaults of malignity, was given by the late excellent bishop Porteus, in his animated defence of archbishop Secker! May his own fair fame never stand in need of any such warm vindication, which, however, it could not fail to find in the bosom of every good man!—The fine talents of this lamented prelate, uniformly devoted to the purposes for which God gave them—his life directed to those duties to which his

charity, though well understood, is often mistakingly exercised.

If we were called upon to collect the greatest quantity of hyperbole—falsehood might be too harsh a term—in the least given time and space, we should do well to search for it in those sacred edifices expressly consecrated to truth. There we should see the ample mass of canonizing kindness which fills their mural decorations, expressed in all those flattering records inscribed by every variety of motive to every variety of claim. In addition to what is dedicated to real merit by real sorrow, we should hear of tears which were never shed, grief which was never felt, praise which was never earned; we should see what is raised by the decent demands of connexion, by tender, but undiscerning friendship, by poetic license, by eloquent gratitude for testamentary favours.

It is an amiable though not a correct feeling in human nature, that, fancying we have not done justice to certain characters during their lives, we run into the error of supposed compensation by over estimating them after their decease.

On account of neighbourhood, affinity, long acquaintance, or some pleasing qualities, we may have entertained a kindness for many persons, of whose

high professional station called him—his Christian graces—those engaging manners which shed a soft lustre on the firm fidelity of his friendships—that kindness which was ever flowing from his heart to his lips—the benignity and candor which distinguished not his conversation only, but his conduct—these and all those amiable qualities, that gentle temper and correct cheerfulness with which he adorned society, will ever endear his memory to all who knew him intimately; and let his friends remember, that to imitate his virtues, will be the best proof of their remembering them.

state however, while they lived, we could not with the utmost stretch of charity, think favourably. If their ickness has been long and severe, our compassion having been kept by that circumstance in a state of continual excitement, though we lament their death, yet we feel thankful that their suffering is at an end. Forgetting our former opinion, and the course of life on which it was framed, we fall into all the common-place of consolation,—'God is merciful—we trust that they are at rest—what a happy release they have had!'—Nay, it is well if we do not go so far as to entertain a kind of vague belief that their better qualities joined to their sufferings have, on the whole, ensured their felicity.

Thus at once losing sight of that word of God which cannot lie, of our former regrets on their subject, losing the remembrance of their defective principles and thoughtless conduct; without any reasonable ground for altering our opinion, any pretence for entertaining a better hope—we assume that they are happy. We reason as if we believed that the suffering of the body had purchased the salvation of the soul, as if it had rendered any doubt almost criminal. We seem to make ourselves easy on the falsest ground imaginable, not because we believe their hearts were changed, but because they are now beyond all possibility of change.

But surely the mere circumstance of death will not have rendered them fit for that heaven for which we before feared they were unfit. Far be it from us, indeed, blind and sinful as we are, to pass sentence upon *them*, to pass sentence upon *any*. We dare not venture to pronounce what may have passed between God and their souls, even at the last hour. We know that infinite mercy is not restricted to times or sea-

sons; to an early or a late repentance: we know not but in that little interval their peace was made, their pardon granted, through the atoning blood, and powerful intercession of their Redeemer. Nor should we too scrupulously pry into the state of others, never, indeed, except to benefit them or ourselves; we should rather imitate the example of Christ, who at once gave an admirable lesson of meekness and charitable judgment, when avoiding an answer which might have led to fruitless discussion, he gave a reproof under the shape of an exhortation.—In reply to the inquiry, 'Are there few that be saved,' he thus checked vain curiosity—'Strive (you) to enter in at the straight gate.' On another occasion, in the same spirit, he corrected inquisitiveness, not by an answer, but by an interrogation and a precept—'What is that to thee? Follow thou me.'

But where there is strong ground to apprehend that the contrary may have been the case, it is very dangerous to pronounce peremptorily on the safety of the dead. Because if we allow ourselves to be fully persuaded that they are entered upon a state of happiness, it will naturally and fatally tempt us to lower our own standard. If we are ready to conclude that *they* are now in a state of glory whose principles we believe to be incorrect, whose practice, to say the least of it, we know to have been negligent, who, without our indulging a censorious or a presumptuous spirit, we thought lived in a state of mind, and a course of habits, not only far from right, but even avowedly inferior to our own; will not this lead to the conclusion, either that we ourselves, standing on so much higher ground, are in a very advanced state of grace, or that a much lower than ours may be a state of safety? And will not such a

belief tend to slacken our endeavours, and to lower our tone, both of faith and practice?

By this conclusion we contradict the affecting assertion of a very sublime poet,

For us they sicken and for us they die.

For while we are thus taking and giving false comfort our friend as to us will have died in vain. Instead of his death having operated as a warning voice, to rouse us to a more animated piety, it will be rather likely to lull us into a dangerous security. If our affection has so blinded our judgment, we shall by the indulgence of a false candour to another, sink into a false peace ourselves.

It will be a wounding circumstance to the feelings of surviving friendship, to see a person of loose habits, whom though we loved, yet we feared to admonish, and that because we loved him; for whom, though we saw his danger, yet perhaps we neglected to pray; to see him brought to that ultimate and fixed state in which admonition is impossible, in which prayer is not only fruitless, but unlawful.

Another distressing circumstance frequently occurs. We meet with affectionate but irreligious parents, who though kind and perhaps amiable, have neither lived themselves, nor educated their families in christian principles, nor in habits of christian piety. A child at the age of maturity dies. Deep is the affliction of the doting parent. The world is a blank. He looks round for comfort where he has been accustomed to look for it among his friends. He finds it not. He looks up for it where he has not been accustomed to seek it. Neither his heart nor his treasure has been laid up in heaven. Yet a

paroxysm, of what may be termed natural devotion, gives to his grief an air of piety. The first cry of anguish is commonly religious.

The lamented object perhaps, through utter ignorance of the awful gulf which was opening to receive him, added to a tranquil temper, might have expired without evidencing any great distress, and his *happy death* is industriously proclaimed through the neighbourhood, and the mourning parents have only to wish that their latter end may be like his. They cheat at once their sorrow and their souls, with the soothing notion that they shall soon meet their beloved child in Heaven. Of this they persuade themselves as firmly and as fondly, as if both they and the object of their grief had been living in the way which leads thither. Oh, for that unbought treasure, a sincere, a real friend, who might lay hold on the propitious moment! When the heart is softened by sorrow, it might possibly, if ever, be led to its true remedy. This would indeed be a more unequivocal, because more painful act of friendship than pouring in the lulling opiate of false consolation, which we are too ready to administer, because it saves our own feelings, while it sooths, without healing, those of the mourner.

But perhaps the integrity of the friend conquers his timidity. Alas! he is honestly explicit to unattending or to offended ears.—They refuse to hear the voice of the charmer. But if the mourners will not endure the voice of exhortation now, while there is hope, how will they endure the sound of the last trumpet when hope is at an end? If they will not bear the gentle whispers of friendship, how will they bear the voice of the accusing angel, the terrible sentence of the incensed Judge? If private re-

proof be intolerable, how will they stand the being made a spectacle to angels and to men, even to the whole assembled universe, to the whole creation of God?

But instead of converting the friendly warning to their eternal benefit, they are probably wholly bent on their own vindication. Still their character is dearer to them than their soul.—'We never,' say they, 'were any man's enemy.'—Yes—you have been the enemy of all to whom you have given a bad example. You have especially been the enemy of your children in whom you have implanted no christian principles. Still they insist with the prophet that 'there is no iniquity in them that can be called iniquity.' 'We have wronged no one,' say they, 'we have given to every one his due. We have done our duty.' Your first duty was to God. You have robbed your Maker of the service due to him. You have robbed your Redeemer of the souls he died to save. You have robbed your own soul and too probably the souls of those whom you have so wretchedly educated of eternal happiness.

Thus the flashes of religion which darted in upon their conscience in the first burst of sorrow, too frequently die away; they expire before the grief which kindled them. They resort again to their old resource, the world, which if it cannot soon heal their sorrow, at least soon diverts it.

To shut our eyes upon death as an object of terror or of hope, and to consider it only as a release or an extinction, is viewing it under a character which is not its own. But to get rid of the idea at any rate, and then boast that we do not fear the thing we do not think of is not difficult. Nor is it difficult to think of it without alarm if we do not include its

consequences. But to him who frequently repeats, not mechanically but devoutly, 'we know that THOU shalt come to be our Judge,' death cannot be a matter of indifference.

Another cause of these *happy deaths* is that many think salvation a slight thing, that heaven is cheaply obtained, that a merciful God is easily pleased, that we are Christians, and that mercy comes of course to those who have always professed to believe that Christ died to purchase it for them. This notion of God being more merciful than he has any where declared himself to be, instead of inspiring them with more gratitude to him, inspires more confidence in themselves. This corrupt faith generates a corrupt morality. It leads to this strange consequence, not to make them love God better, but to venture on offending him more.

People talk as if the act of death made a complete change in the nature, as well as in the condition of man. Death is the vehicle to another state of being, but possesses no power to qualify us for that state. In conveying us to a new world it does not give us a new heart. It puts the unalterable stamp of decision on the character, but does not transform it into a character diametrically opposite.

Our affections themselves will be rather raised than altered. Their tendencies will be the same, though their advancement will be incomparably higher. They will be exalted in their degree, but not changed in their nature. They will be purified from all earthly mixtures, cleansed from all human pollutions, the principle will be cleared from its imperfections, but it will not become another principle. He that is unholy will not be made holy by death. The heart will not have a new object to

seek, but will be directed more intensely to the same object.

They who loved God here will love him far more in heaven, because they will know him far better. There he will reign without a competitor. They who served him here in sincerity will there serve him in perfection. If 'the pure in heart shall see God,' let us remember that this purity is not to be contracted after we have been admitted to its remuneration. The beatitude is pledged as a reward for the purity, not as a qualification for it. Purity will be sublimated in heaven, but will not begin to be produced there. It is to be acquired by passing through the refiner's fire here, not through the penal and expiatory fire which human ingenuity devised to purge offending man

From the foul deeds done in his days of nature.

The extricated spirit will be separated from the feculence of all that belongs to sin, to sense, to self. We shall indeed find ourselves new, because spiritualized beings; but if the cast of the mind were not in a great measure the same, how should we retain our identity? The soul will there become that which it here desired to be, that which it mourned because it was so far from being. It will have obtained that complete victory over its corruptions which it here only desired, which it here only struggled to obtain.

Here our love of spiritual things is superinduced, there it will be our natural frame. The impression of God on our hearts will be stamped deeper, but it will not be a different impression. Our obedience will be more voluntary, because there will be no rival propensities to obstruct it. It will be more entire,

because it will have to struggle with no counteracting force.—Here we sincerely though imperfectly love the law of God, even though it controls our perverse will, though it contradicts our corruptions. There our love will be complete, because our will will retain no perverseness, and our corruptions will be done away.

Repentance, precious at all seasons, in the season of health is noble. It is a generous principle when it overtakes us surrounded with the prosperities of life, when it is not put off till distress drives us to it. Seriousness of spirit is most acceptable to God when danger is out of sight, preparations for death when death appears to be at a distance.

Virtue and piety are founded on the nature of things, on the laws of God, not on any vicissitudes in human circumstances. Irreligion, folly and vice, are just as unreasonable in the meridian of life as at the approach of death. They strike us differently but they always retain their own character. Every argument against an irreligious death is equally cogent against an irreligious life. Piety and penitence may be quickened by the near view of death, but the reasons for practising them are not founded on its nearness. Death may stimulate our fears for the consequences of vice, but furnishes no motive for avoiding it, which christianity had not taught before. The necessity of religion is as urgent now as it will be when we are dying. It may not appear so, but the reality of a thing does not depend on appearances. Besides, if the necessity of being religious depended on the approach of death, what moment of our lives is there, in which we have any security against it? In every point of view, therefore, the

same necessity for being religious subsists when we are in full health as when we are about to die.

We may then fairly arrive at this conclusion, that there is no *happy death* but that which conducts to a *happy immortality:*—No joy in putting off the body, if we have not put on the Lord Jesus Christ;—No consolation in escaping from the miseries of time, till we have obtained a well grounded hope of a blessed eternity.

CHAP. XX.

ON THE SUFFERINGS OF GOOD MEN.

AFFLICTION is the school in which great virtues are acquired, in which great characters are formed. It is a kind of moral Gymnasium, in which the disciples of Christ are trained to robust exercise, hardy exertion, and severe conflict.

We do not hear of martial heroes in 'the calm and piping time of peace,' nor of the most eminent saints in the quiet and unmolested periods of ecclesiastical history. We are far from denying that the principle of courage in the warrior, or of piety in the saint continues to subsist, ready to be brought into action when perils beset the country or trials assail the church; but it must be allowed that in long periods of inaction, both are liable to decay.

The christian, in our comparatively tranquil day, is happily exempt from the trials and the terrors which the annals of persecution record. Thanks to the establishment of a pure Christianity in the

church, thanks to the infusion of the same pure principle into our laws, and to the mild and tolerating spirit of both—a man is so far from being liable to pains and penalties for his attachment to his religion, that he is protected in its exercise; and were certain existing statutes enforced, he would even incur penalties for his violation of religious duties, rather than for his observance of them.*

Yet still the christian is not exempt from his individual, his appropriate, his undefined trials. We refer not merely to those 'cruel mockings,' which the acute sensibility of the apostle led him to rank in the same catalogue with bonds, imprisonments, exile and martyrdom itself. We allude not altogether to those misrepresentations and calumnies to which the zealous christian is peculiarly liable; nor exclusively to those difficulties to which his very adherence to the principles he professes, must necessarily subject him; nor entirely to those occasional sacrifices of credit, of advancement, of popular applause, to which his refusing to sail with the tide of popular opinion may compel him; nor solely to the disadvantages which under certain circumstances his not preferring expediency to principle may expose him. But the truly good man is not only often called to struggle with trials of large dimensions, with exigencies of obvious difficulty, but to encounter others which are better understood than defined.

> And duller would he be than the fat weed
> That rots itself at ease on Lethe's wharf,

* We allude to the laws against swearing, attending public worship, &c.

were he left to batten undisturbed, in peaceful security, on the unwholesome pastures of rank prosperity. The thick exhalations drawn up from this gross soil render the atmosphere so heavy as to obstruct the ascent of piety, her flagging pinions are kept down by the influence of this moist vapour; she is prevented from soaring,

> ——————— to live insphered
> In regions mild of calm and serene air,
> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
> Which men call earth.

The pampered christian thus continually gravitating to the earth, would have his heart solely bent to

> Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
> Unmindful of the crown *religion* gives,
> After this mortal change, to her true servants.

It is an unspeakable blessing that no events are left to the choice of beings, who from their blindness would seldom fail to choose amiss. Were circumstances at our own disposal we should allot ourselves nothing but ease and success, but riches and fame, but protracted youth, perpetual health, unvaried happiness.

All this as it would not be very unnatural, so perhaps it would not be very wrong, for beings who were always to live on earth. But for beings who are placed here in a state of trial and not established in their final home, whose condition in eternity depends on the use they make of time, nothing would be more dangerous than such a power, nothing more fatal than the consequences to which such a power would lead.

If a surgeon were to put into the hand of a wounded patient the probe or the lancet, with how much false tenderness would he treat himself! How skin-deep would be the examination, how slight the incision! The patient would escape the pain, but the wound might prove mortal. The practitioner therefore wisely uses his instruments himself. He goes deep perhaps, but not deeper than the case demands. The pain may be acute, but the life is preserved.

Thus HE in whose hands we are, is too good, and loves us too well to trust us with ourselves. He knows that we will not contradict our own inclinations, that we will not impose on ourselves any thing unpleasant, that we will not inflict on ourselves any voluntary pain, however necessary the infliction, however salutary the effect. God graciously does this for us himself, or he knows it would never be done.

A christian is liable to the same sorrows and sufferings with other men: he has no where any promise of immunity from the troubles of life, but he has a merciful promise of support under them. He considers them in another view, he bears them with another spirit, he improves them to other purposes than those whose views are bounded by this world. Whatever may be the instruments of his sufferings, whether sickness, losses, calumnies, persecutions, he knows that it proceeds from God; all means are HIS instruments. All inferior causes operate by HIS directing hand.

We said that a christian is liable to the same sufferings with other men. Might we not repeat what we have before said, that his very christian profession is often the cause of his sufferings? They are the badge of his discipleship, the evidences of his

Father's love; they are at once the marks of God's favour, and the materials of his own future happiness.

What were the arguments of worldly advantage held out through the whole New Testament, to induce the world to embrace the religion it taught? What was the condition of St. Paul's introduction to Christianity? It was not—I will crown him with honour and prosperity, with dignity and pleasure, but—'I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.'

What were the virtues which Christ chiefly taught in his discourses? What were the graces he most recommended by his example? Self-denial, mortification, patience, long-suffering, renouncing ease and pleasure. These are the marks which have ever since its first appearance, distinguished Christianity from all the religions in the world, and on that account evidently prove its divine original. Ease, splendor, external prosperity, conquest, made no part of its establishment. Other empires have been founded in the blood of the vanquished,—the dominion of Christ was founded in his own blood. Most of the beatitudes which infinite compassion pronounced, have the sorrows of earth for their subject, but the joys of heaven for their completion.

To establish this religion in the world, the Almighty, as his own word assures us, subverted kingdoms and altered the face of nations. 'For thus saith the Lord of Hosts,' (by his prophet Haggai) 'yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.' Could a religion, the kingdom of which was to be founded by such awful means,

be established, be perpetuated, without involving the sufferings of its subjects?

If the christian course had been meant for a path of roses, would the life of the author of Christianity have been a path strewed with thorns? 'He made for us,' says bishop Jeremy Taylor, 'a covenant of sufferings, his very promises were sufferings; his rewards were sufferings, and his arguments to invite men to follow him were only taken from sufferings in this life, and the reward of sufferings hereafter.'

But if no prince but the Prince of Peace ever set out with the proclamation of the reversionary nature of his empire—if no other king, to allay avarice and check ambition, ever invited subjects by the unalluring declaration that 'his kingdom was not of this world'—if none other ever declared that it was not dignity or honours, valour or talents that made them 'worthy of him,' but 'taking up the cross'—if no other ever made the sorrows which would attend his followers a motive for their attachment—yet no other ever had the goodness to promise, or the power to make his promise good, that he would give 'rest to the heavy laden.' Other sovereigns have 'overcome the world' for their own ambition, but none besides ever thought of making the 'tribulation' which should be the effect of that conquest, a ground for animating the fidelity of his followers—ever thought of bidding them 'be of good cheer,' because he had overcome the world in a sense which was to make his subjects lose all hope of rising in it.

The apostle to the Phillipians enumerated it among the honours and distinctions prepared for his most favoured converts, not only that 'they should believe in Christ,' but that they should also 'suffer for

him.' Any other religion would have made use of such a promise as an argument to deter, not to attract. That a religion should flourish the more under such discouraging invitations, with the threat of even degrading circumstances and absolute losses, is an unanswerable evidence that it was of no human origin.

It is among the mercies of God, that he strengthens the virtues of his servants by hardening them under the cold and bracing climate of adverse fortune, instead of leaving them to languish under the shining but withering sun of unclouded prosperity. When they cannot be attracted to him by gentler influences, he sends these salutary storms and tempests, which purify while they alarm. Our gracious Father knows that eternity is long enough for his children to be happy in.

The character of christianity may be seen by the very images of military conflict, under which the scriptures so frequently exhibit it. Suffering is the initiation into a christian's calling. It is his education for heaven. Shall the scholar rebel at the discipline which is to fit him for his profession, or the soldier at the exercise which is to qualify him for victory?

But the christian's trials do not all spring from without. He would think them comparatively easy, had he only the opposition of men to struggle against, or even the severer dispensations of God to sustain. If he has a conflict with the world, he has a harder conflict with sin. His bosom foe is his most unyielding enemy;

> His warfare is within, there unfatigued
> His fervent spirit labours.

This it is which makes his other trials heavy, which makes his power of sustaining them weak, which renders his conquest over them slow and inconclusive; which too often solicits him to oppose interest to duty, indolence to resistance, and self-indulgence to victory.

This world is the stage on which worldly men more exclusively act, and the things of the world, and the applause of the world, are the rewards which they propose to themselves. These they often attain—with these they are satisfied. They aim at no higher end, and of their aim they are not disappointed. But let not the Christian repine at the success of those whose motives he rejects, whose practices he dares not adopt, whose ends he deprecates. If he feel any disposition to murmur when he sees the irreligious in great prosperity, let him ask himself if he would tread their path to attain their end—if he would do their work to obtain their wages? He knows he would not. Let him then cheerfully leave them to scramble for the prizes, and jostle for the places, which the world temptingly holds out, but which he will not purchase at the world's price.

Consult the page of history, and observe, not only if the best men have been the most successful, but even if they have not often eminently failed in great enterprizes, undertaken perhaps on the purest principles; while unworthy instruments have been often employed, not only to produce dangerous revolutions, but to bring about events ultimately tending to the public benefit; enterprizes in which good men feared to engage, which perhaps they were not competent to effect, or in effecting which they might

have wounded their conscience and endangered their souls.

Good causes are not always conducted by good men. A good cause may be connected with something that is not good, with party for instance. Party often does that for virtue, which virtue is not able to do for herself; and thus the right cause is promoted and effected by some subordinate, even by some wrong motive. A worldly man, connecting himself with a religious cause, gives it that importance in the eyes of the world, which neither its own rectitude, nor that of its religious supporters, had been able to give it. Nay the very piety of its advocates—for worldly men always connect piety with imprudence—had brought the wisdom, or at least the *expediency* of the cause into suspicion, and it is at last carried by a means foreign to itself. The character of the cause must be lowered, we had almost said, it must in a certain degree be deteriorated, to suit the general taste, even to obtain the approbation of that multitude for whose benefit it is intended.

How long, as we have had occasion to observe in another connexion, had the world groaned under the most tremendous engine which superstition and despotism, in dreadful confederation, ever contrived to force the consciences, and torture the bodies of men; where racks were used for persuasion, and flames for arguments! The best of men for ages have been mourning under this dread tribunal, without being competent to effect its overthrow; the worst of men has been able to accomplish it with a word.—It is a humiliating lesson for good men, when they thus see how entirely instrumentality may be separated from personal virtue.

We still fall into the error of which the prophet so long ago complained, 'we call the proud happy,' and the wicked fortunate, and our hearts are too apt to rise at their successes. We pretend indeed that they rise with indignation; but is it not to be feared that with this indignation is mixed a little envy, a little rebellion against God? We murmur, though we know that when the instrument has finished his work, the divine employer throws him by, cuts him off, lets him perish.

But you envy him in the midst of that work, to accomplish which he has sacrificed every principle of justice, truth, and mercy. Is this a man to be envied? Is this a prosperity to be grudged? Would you incur the penalties of that happiness at which you are not ashamed to murmur?

But is it happiness to commit sin, to be abhorred by good men, to offend God, to ruin his own soul? Do you really consider a temporary success a recompense for deeds which will ensure eternal wo to the perpetrator? Is the successful bad man happy? Of what materials then is happiness made up? Is it composed of a disturbed mind and an unquiet conscience? Are doubt and difficulty, are terror and apprehension, are distrust and suspicion, felicities for which a christian would renounce his peace, would displease his Maker, would risk his soul? Think of the hidden vulture that feeds on the vitals of successful wickedness, and your repinings, your envy, if you are so unhappy as to feel envy, will cease. Your indignation will be converted into compassion, your execrations into prayer.

But if he feel neither the scourge of conscience nor the sting of remorse, pity him the more. Pity him for the very want of that addition to his un-

happiness: for if he added to his miseries that of anticipating his punishment, he might be led by repentance to avoid it. Can you reckon the blinding his eyes and the hardening his heart, any part of his happiness? This opinion, however, you practically adopt, whenever you grudge the prosperity of the wicked. God, by delaying the punishment of bad men, for which we are so impatient, may have designs of mercy of which we know nothing;—mercy perhaps to them, or if not to them, yet mercy to those who are suffering by them, and whom he intends by these bad instruments, to punish, and by punishing, eventually to save.

There is another sentiment which prosperous wickedness excites in certain minds, that is almost more preposterous than envy itself,—and that is respect; but this feeling is never raised unless both the wickedness and the prosperity be on a grand scale.

This sentiment also is founded in secret impiety, in the belief either that God does not govern human affairs, or that the motives of actions are not regarded by him, or that prosperity is a certain proof of his favour, or that where there is success there must be worth. These flatterers however forsake the prosperous with their good fortune; their applause is withheld with the success which attracted it. As they were governed by events in their admiration, so events lead them to withdraw it.

But in this admiration there is a bad taste as well as a bad principle. If ever wickedness pretends to excite any idea of sublimity, it must be, not in its elevation but its fall. If ever Caius Marius raises any such sentiment, it is not when he carried the world before him, it is not in his seditious and

bloody triumphs at Rome, but it is when in poverty and exile his intrepid look caused the dagger to drop from the hand of the executioner;—it is when sitting among the venerable ruins of Carthage he enjoined a desolation so congenial to his own—Dionisius, in the plenitude of arbitrary power, raises our unmixed abhorrence. We detest the oppressor of the people while he continued to trample on them, we execrate the monster who was not ashamed to sell Plato as a slave. If ever we feel any thing like interest on this subject, it is not with the tyrant of Syracuse but with the school-master of Corinth.

But though God may be patient with triumphant wickedness, he does not wink or connive at it. Between being permitted and supported, between being employed and approved, the distance is wider than we are ready to acknowledge. Perhaps 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' God has always the means of punishment as well as of pardon in his own hands. But to punish just at the moment when *we* would hurl the bolt, might break in on a scheme of Providence of wide extent and indefinite consequences. 'They have drunk their hemlock,' says a fine writer, 'but the poison does not yet work.' Perhaps the convulsion may be the more terrible for the delay. Let us not be impatient to accomplish a sentence which infinite justice sees right to defer;—it is always time enough to enter into hell. Let us think more of restraining our own vindictive tempers, than of precipitating their destruction. They may yet repent of their crimes they are perpetrating. God may still by some scheme, intricate, and unintelligible to us, pardon the sin which we think exceeds the limits even of his mercy.

But we contrive to make revenge itself look like religion. We call down thunder on many a head under pretence, that those on whom we invoke it are God's enemies, when perhaps we invoke it because they are ours.

But though they should go on with a full tide of prosperity to the end, will it not cure our impatience that that end must come? Will it not satisfy us that they must die, that they must come to judgment? Which is to be envied, the Christian who dies and his brief sorrows have a period, or he who closes a prosperous life and enters on a miserable eternity? The one has nothing to fear if the promises of the Gospel be true, the other nothing to hope if they be not false. The word of God must be a lie, heaven a fable, hell an invention, before the impenitent sinner can be safe. Is that man to be envied whose security depends on their falsehood? Is the other to be pitied whose hope is founded on their reality? Can that state be happiness, which results from believing that there is no God, no future reckoning? Can that state be misery which consists in knowing that there is both?

In estimating the comparative happiness of good and bad men, we should ever bear in mind that of all the calamities which can be inflicted or suffered, sin is the greatest, and of all punishments insensibility to sin is the heaviest which the wrath of God inflicts in this world for the commission of it. God so far then from approving a wicked man, because he suffers him to go on triumphantly, seems rather by allowing him to continue his smooth and prosperous course, to have some awful destiny in store for him, which will not perhaps be revealed till his repentance is too late; then his knowledge of God's

displeasure, and the dreadful consequences of that displeasure, may be revealed together, may be revealed when there is no room for mercy.

But without looking to futurity—consulting only the present condition of suffering virtue,—if we put the inward consolation derived from communion with God, the humble confidence of prayer, the devout trust in the divine protection, supports commonly reserved for the afflicted Christian, and eminently bestowed in his greatest exigence; if we place these feelings in the opposite scale with all that unjust power ever bestowed or guilty wealth possessed; we shall have no hesitation in deciding on which side even present happiness lies.

With a mind thus fixed, with a faith thus firm, one great object so absorbs the christian, that his peace is not tossed about with the things which discompose ordinary men. 'My fortune,' may he say, 'it is true is shattered; but as I made not 'fine gold my confidence' while I possessed it, in losing it I have not lost myself. I leaned not on power, for I knew its instability. Had prosperity been my dependance, my support being removed, I must fall.'

In the case of the afflicted Christian you lament perhaps with the wife of the persecuted hero, that he suffers being innocent. But would it extract the sting from suffering, were guilt added to it? Out of two worlds to have all sorrow in this and no hope in the next would be indeed intolerable. Would you have him purchase a reprieve from suffering by sinful compliances? Think how ease would be destroyed by the price paid for it! For how short a time he would enjoy it, even if it were not bought at the expense of his soul!

It would be preposterous to say that suffering is the recompense of virtue, and yet it may with truth be asserted that the capacity for enjoying the reward of virtue is enlarged by suffering, and thus it becomes not only the instrument of promoting virtue, but the instrument of rewarding it. Besides, God chooses for the confirmation of our faith, as well as for the consummation of his gracious plans, to reserve in his own hand this most striking proof of a future retribution. To suppose that he *cannot* ultimately recompense his virtuous afflicted children, is to believe him less powerful than an earthly father;—to suppose that he *will* not is to believe him less merciful.

Great trials are oftener proofs of favour than of displeasure. An inferior officer will suffice for inferior expeditions, but the sovereign selects the ablest general for the most difficult service. And not only does the king evidence his opinion by the selection, but the soldier proves his attachment by rejoicing in the preference. His having gained one victory is no reason for his being set aside. Conquest, which qualifies him for new attacks, suggests a reason for his being again employed.

The sufferings of good men by no means contradict the promise that 'Godliness has the promise of the life that now is,' nor that promise 'that the meek shall inherit the earth.' They possess it by the spirit in which they enjoy its blessings, by the spirit with which they resign them.

The belief too that trials will facilitate salvation is another source of consolation. Sufferings also abate the dread of death by cheapening the price of life. The affections even of the real Christian are too much drawn downwards. His heart too fondly

cleaves to the dust, though he knows that trouble springs out of it. How would it be, if he invariably possessed present enjoyments, and if a long vista of delights lay always open before him? He has a farther comfort in his own honest consciousness; a bright conviction that his christian feeling under trials, is a cheering evidence that his piety is sincere. The gold has been melted down, and its purity is ascertained.

Among his other advantages, the afflicted Christian has that of being able to apply to the mercy of God; not as a new and untried, and therefore an uncertain resource. He does not come as an alien before a strange master, but as a child into the well known presence of a tender father. He did not put off prayer till this pressing exigence. He did not make his God a sort of *dernier resort*, to be had recourse to only in the great water-floods. He had long and diligently sought him in the calm; he had adhered to him, if the phrase may be allowed, before he was driven to it. He had sought God's favour while he enjoyed the favour of the world. He did not wait for the day of evil to seek the supreme Good. He did not defer his meditations on heavenly things to the disconsolate hour when earth has nothing for him. He can cheerfully associate religion with those former days of felicity, when with every thing before him out of which to choose, he chose God. He not only feels the support derived from his present prayers, but the benefit of all those which he offered up in the day of joy and gladness. He will especially derive comfort from the supplications he had made for the anticipated though unknown trial of the present hour, and

which in such a world of vicissitudes, it was reasonable to expect.

Let us confess, then, that in all the trying circumstances of this changeful scene, there is something infinitely soothing to the feelings of a Christian, something inexpressibly tranquillizing to his mind, to know that he has nothing to do with events, but to submit to them; that he has nothing to do with the revolutions of life but to acquiesce in them, as the dispensations of eternal wisdom; that he has not to take the management out of the hands of Providence, but submissively to follow the divine leading; that he has not to contrive for to-morrow, but to acquiesce to-day; not to condition about events yet to come, but to meet those which are present with cheerful resignation. Let him be thankful that as he could not by foreseeing, prevent them, so he was not permitted to foresee them, thankful for ignorance where knowledge would only prolong without preventing suffering; thankful for that grace which has promised that our strength shall be proportioned to our day, thankful that as he is not responsible for trials which he has not brought on himself, so by the goodness of God these trials may be improved to the noblest purposes. The quiet acquiescence of the heart, the annihilation of the will under actual circumstances, be the trial great or small, is more acceptable to God, more indicative of true piety, than the strongest general resolutions of firm acting and deep submission under the most trying unborn events. In the remote case it is the imagination which submits: in the actual case it is the will.

We are too ready to imagine that there is no other way of serving God but by active exertions;

exertions which are often made because they indulge our natural taste, and gratify our own inclinations. But it is an error to imagine that God, by putting us in any supposable situation, puts it out of our power to glorify him; that he can place us under any circumstances which may not be turned to some account, either for ourselves or others. Joseph in his prison, under the strongest disqualifications, loss of liberty, and a blasted reputation, made way for both his own high advancement and for the deliverance of Israel. Daniel in his dungeon, not only the destined prey, but in the very jaws of furious beasts, converted the king of Babylon, and brought him to the knowledge of the true God. Could prosperity have effected the former? Would not prosperity have prevented the latter?

But to descend to more familiar instances;—it is among the ordinary, though most mysterious dispensations of Providence, that many of his appointed servants who are not only eminently fitted, but also most zealously disposed, to glorify their Redeemer by instructing and reforming their fellow creatures, are yet disqualified by disease, and set aside from that public duty of which the necessity is so obvious, and of which the fruits were so remarkable; whilst many others possess uninterrupted health and strength, for the exercise of those functions for which they are little gifted and less disposed.

But God's ways are not as our ways. He is not accountable to his creatures. The caviller would know why it is right. The suffering Christian believes and feels it to be right. He humbly acknowledges the necessity of the affliction which his friends are lamenting; he feels the mercy of the measure which others are suspecting of injustice. With deep

humility he is persuaded that if the affliction is not yet withdrawn, it is because it has not yet accomplished the purpose for which it was sent. The privation is probably intended both for the individual interest of the sufferer, and for the reproof of those who have neglected to profit by his labours. Perhaps God more especially thus draws still nearer to himself, him who had drawn so many others.

But to take a more particular view of the case, we are too ready to consider suffering as an indication of God's displeasure, not so much against sin in general, as against the individual sufferer. Were this the case, then would those saints and martyrs who have pined in exile, and groaned in dungeons, and expired on scaffolds, have been the objects of God's peculiar wrath instead of his special favour. But the truth is, some little tincture of latent infidelity mixes itself in almost all our reasonings on these topics. We do not constantly take into the account a future state. We want God, if I may hazard the expression, to clear himself as he goes. We cannot give him such long credit as the period of human life. He must every moment be vindicating his character against every sceptical cavil; he must unravel his plans to every shallow critic, he must anticipate the knowledge of his design before its operations are completed. If we may adopt a phrase in use among the vulgar, we will trust him no farther than we can see him. Though he has said, 'judge nothing before the time,' we judge instantly, of course rashly, and in general falsely. Were the brevity of earthly prosperity and suffering, the certainty of retributive justice, and the eternity of future blessedness perpetually kept in view, we should have more patience with God.

Even in judging fictitious compositions, we are more just. During the perusal of a tragedy, or any work of invention, though we feel for the distresses of the personages, yet we do not form an ultimate judgment of the propriety or injustice of their sufferings. We wait for the catastrophe. We give the poet credit either that he will extricate them from their distresses, or eventually explain the justice of them. We do not condemn him at the end of every scene for the trials of that scene, which the sufferers do not appear to have deserved; for the sufferings which do not always seem to have arisen from their own misconduct. We behold the trials of the virtuous with sympathy, and the successes of the wicked with indignation; but we do not pass our final sentence till the poet has passed his. We reserve our decisive judgment till the last scene closes, till the curtain drops. Shall we not treat the schemes of infinite wisdom with as much respect as the plot of a drama?

But to borrow our illustration from realities.—In a court of justice the by-standers do not give their sentence in the midst of a trial. We wait patiently till all the evidence is collected, and circumstantially detailed, and finally summed up. And—to pursue the illusion—imperfect as human decisions may possibly be, fallible as we must allow the most deliberate and honest verdict must prove, we commonly applaud the justice of the jury, and the equity of the judge. The felon they condemn, we rarely acquit; where they remit judgment, we rarely denounce it.—It is only INFINITE WISDOM on whose purposes we cannot rely; it is only INFINITE MERCY whose operations we cannot trust. It is only 'the Judge of all the earth' who cannot do right. We

reverse the order of God by summoning HIM to our bar, at whose awful bar we shall soon be judged.

But to return to our more immediate point—the apparently unfair distribution of prosperity between good and bad men. As their case is opposite in every thing—the one is constantly deriving his happiness from that which is the source of the other's misery, a sense of the divine omniscience. The eye of God is a 'pillar of light' to the one, 'and a cloud and darkness' to the other. It is no less a terror to him who dreads HIS justice, than a joy to him who derives all his support from the awful thought, THOU GOD SEEST!

But as we have already observed, can we want a broader line of discrimination between them, than their actual condition here, independently of the different portions reserved for them hereafter? Is it not distinction enough that the one, though sad, is safe; that the other, though confident, is insecure? Is not the one as far from rest as he is from virtue, as far from the enjoyment of quiet as from the hope of heaven, as far from peace as he is from God? Is it nothing that every day brings the Christian nearer to his crown, and that the sinner is every day working his way nearer to his ruin? The hour of death, which the one dreads as something worse than extinction, is to the other the hour of his nativity, the birth-day of immortality. At the height of his sufferings, the good man knows that they will soon terminate. In the zenith of his success the sinner has a similar assurance. But how different is the result of the same conviction! An invincible faith sustains the one, in the severest calamities, while an inextinguishable dread gives the lie to the proudest triumphs of the other.

He then, after all, is the only happy man,—not whom worldly prosperity renders apparently happy, but whom no change of worldly circumstances can make essentially miserable; whose peace depends not on external events, but on an internal support; not on that success which is common to all, but on that hope which is the peculiar privilege, on that promise which is the sole prerogative of a Christian.

CHAP. XXI.

THE TEMPER AND CONDUCT OF THE CHRISTIAN IN SICKNESS AND IN DEATH.

The pagan philosophers have given many admirable precepts both for resigning blessings and for sustaining misfortunes; but wanting the motives and sanctions of Christianity, though they excite much intellectual admiration, they produce little practical effect. The stars which glittered in their moral night, though bright, imparted no warmth. Their most beautiful dissertations on death had no charm to extract its sting. We receive no support from their most elaborate treatises on immortality, for want of Him who 'brought life and immortality to light.' Their consolatory discussions could not strip the grave of its terrors, for to them it was not 'swallowed up in victory.' To conceive of the soul as an immortal principle, without proposing a scheme for the pardon of its sins, was but cold consolation. Their future state was but a happy guess: their heaven but a fortunate conjecture.

When we peruse their finest compositions, we admire the manner in which the medicine is administered, but we do not find it effectual for the cure, nor even for the mitigation of our disease. The beauty of the sentiment we applaud, but our heart continues to ake. There is no healing balm in their elegant prescription. These four *little* words, 'THY WILL BE DONE,' contain a charm of more powerful efficacy than all the discipline of the stoic school! They cut up a long train of clear but cold reasoning, and supersede whole volumes of argument on fate and necessity.

What sufferer ever derived any ease from the subtle distinction of the hair-splitting casuist, who allowed 'that pain was very troublesome, but resolved never to acknowledge it to be an evil!' There is an equivocation in his manner of stating the proposition. He does not directly say that pain is not an evil, but by a sophistical turn professes that philosophy will never *confess* it to be an evil. But what consolation does the sufferer draw from the quibbling nicety? 'What difference is there,' as archbishop Tillotson well inquires, 'between things being troublesome and being evils, when all the evil of an affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us?'

Christianity knows none of these fanciful distinctions. She never pretends to insist that pain is not an evil, but she does more; she converts it into a good. Christianity therefore teaches a fortitude as much more noble than philosophy, as meeting pain with resignation to the hand that inflicts it, is more heroic than denying it to be an evil.

To submit on the mere human ground that there is no alternative, is not resignation but hopelessness. To bear affliction solely because impatience will not remove it, is but an inferior, though a just reason for bearing it. It savours rather of despair than submission, when not sanctioned by a higher principle.—'It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good,' is at once a motive of more powerful obligation, than all the documents which philosophy ever suggested; a firmer ground of support than all the energies that natural fortitude ever supplied.

Under any visitation, sickness for instance, God permits us to think the affliction 'not joyous but grievous.' But though he allows us to feel, we must not allow ourselves to repine. There is again a sort of heroism in bearing up against affliction, which some adopt on the ground that it raises their character, and confers dignity on their suffering. This philosophic firmness is far from being the temper which Christianity inculcates.

When we are compelled by the hand of God to endure sufferings, or driven by a conviction of the vanity of the world to renounce its enjoyments, we must not endure the one on the low principle of its being inevitable, nor, in flying from the other, must we retire to the contemplation of our own virtues. We must not, with a sullen intrepidity, collect ourselves into a centre of our own; into a cold apathy to all without, and a proud approbation of all within. We must not contract our scattered faults into a sort of dignified selfishness; nor concentrate our feelings into a proud magnanimity, we must not adopt an independent rectitude. A gloomy stoicism is not Christian he-

roism. A melancholy nonresistance is not Christian resignation.

Nor must we indemnify ourselves for our outward self-control by secret murmurings. We may be admired for our resolution in this instance, as for our generosity and disinterestedness in other instances; but we deserve little commendation for whatever we give up, if we do not give up our own inclination. It is inward repining that we must endeavour to repress; it is the discontent of the heart, the unexpressed but not unfelt murmur, against which we must pray for grace, and struggle for resistance. We must not smother our discontents before others, and feed on them in private. It is the hidden rebellion of the will we must subdue, if we would submit as Christians. Nor must we justify our impatience by saying, that if our affliction did not disqualify us from being useful to our families, and active in the service of God, we could more cheerfully bear it. Let us rather be assured that it does not disqualify us for that duty which we most need, and to which God calls us by the very disqualification.

A constant posture of defence against the attacks of our great spiritual enemy, is a better security than an incidental blow, or even an occasional victory. It is also a better preparation for all the occurrences of life. It is not some signal act of mortification, but an habitual state of discipline which will prepare us for great trials. A soul ever on the watch, fervent in prayer, diligent in self-inspection, frequent in meditation, fortified against the vanities of time by repeated views of eternity all the avenues to such a heart will be in a good

measure shut against temptation, barred in a great degree against the tempter. 'Strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,' it will be enabled to resist the one, to expel the other. To a mind so prepared, the thoughts of sickness will not be new, for he knows it is the 'condition of the battle:' the prospect of death will not be surprising, for he knows it is its termination.

The period is now come when we must summon all the fortitude of the rational being, all the resignation of the christian. The principles we have been learning must now be made practical.—The speculations we have admired we must now realize. All that we have been studying was in order to furnish materials for this grand exigence. All the strength we have been collecting must now be brought into action. We must now draw to a point all the scattered arguments, all the several motives, all the individual supports, all the cheering promises of religion. We must exemplify all the rules we have given to others; we must embody all the resolutions we have formed for ourselves; we must reduce our precepts to experience; we must pass from discourses on submission to its exercise; from dissertations on suffering to sustaining it. We must heroically call up the determinations of our better days. We must recollect what we have said of the supports of faith and hope when our strength was in full vigour, when our heart was at ease, and our mind undisturbed. Let us collect all that remains to us of mental strength. Let us implore the aid of holy hope and fervent faith, to show that religion is not a beautiful theory but a soul-sustaining truth.

Endeavour without harassing scrutiny or distressing doubt, to act on the principles which your sounder judgment formerly admitted. The strongest faith is wanted in the hardest trials. Under those trials, to the confirmed Christian the highest degree of grace is commonly imparted. Impair not that faith on which you rested when your mind was strong, by suspecting its validity now it is weak. That which had your full assent in perfect health, which was then firmly rooted in your spirit, and grounded in your understanding, must not be unfixed by the doubts of an enfeebled reason and the scruples of an impaired judgment. You may not now be able to determine on the reasonableness of propositions, but you may derive strong consolation from conclusions which were once fully established in your mind.

The reflecting Christian will consider the natural evil of sickness as the consequence and punishment of moral evil. He will mourn, not only that he suffers pain, but because that pain is the effect of sin. If man had not sinned, he would not have suffered. The heaviest aggravation of his pain is to know that he has deserved it. But it is a counterbalance to this trial to know that our merciful Father has no pleasure in the sufferings of his children; that he chastens them in love; that he never inflicts a stroke which he could safely spare; that he inflicts it to purify as well as to punish, to caution as well as to cure, to improve as well as to chastise.

What a support in the dreary season of sickness is it to reflect, that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings; that if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him, which implies also the reverse, that if we do not suffer with

him, we shall not reign with him; that is, if we suffer merely because we cannot help it, without reference to him, without suffering for his sake and in his spirit. If it be not sanctified suffering it will avail but little. We shall not be paid for having suffered, as in the creed of too many, but our meetness for the kingdom of glory will be increased if we suffer according to his will and after his example.

He who is brought to serious reflection by the salutary affliction of a sick bed, will look back with astonishment on his former false estimate of worldly things. Riches! Beauty! Pleasure! Genius! Fame! —What are they in the eyes of the sick and dying?

Riches! These are so far from affording him a moment's ease, that it will be well if no former misapplication of them aggravate his present pains. He feels as if he only wished to live that he might henceforth dedicate them to the purposes for which they were given.

Beauty! What is beauty, he cries, as he considers his own sunk eyes, hollow cheeks, and pallid countenance. He acknowledges with the Psalmist, that the consuming of beauty is 'the rebuke with which the Almighty corrects man for sin.'

Genius! What is it? Without religion, genius is only a lamp on the gate of a palace. It may serve to cast a gleam of light on those without, while the inhabitant sits in darkness.

Pleasure! That has not left a trace behind it. 'It died in the birth, and is not therefore worthy to come into this bill of Mortality.'*

Fame! Of this his very soul acknowledges the emptiness. He is astonished how he could ever be

* Bishop Hall.

so infatuated as to run after a sound, to court a breath, to pursue a shadow, to embrace a cloud. Augustus, asking his friends as they surrounded his dying bed, if he had acted his part well, on their answering in the affirmative, cried *plaudite*. But the acclamations of the whole universe would rather mock than sooth the dying Christian if unsanctioned by the hope of the divine approbation. He now rates at its just value that fame which was so often eclipsed by envy, and which will be so soon forgotten in death. He has no ambition left but for heaven, where there will be neither envy, death, nor forgetfulness.

When capable of reflection, the sick Christian will revolve all the sins and errors of his past life; he will humble himself for them as sincerely as if he had never repented of them before; and implore the divine forgiveness as fervently as if he did not believe they were long since forgiven. The remembrance of his former offences will grieve him, but the humble hope that they are pardoned will fill him 'with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

Even in this state of helplessness he may improve his self-acquaintance. He may detect new deficiencies in his character, fresh imperfections in his virtues. Omissions will now strike him with the force of actual sins. Resignation, which he fancied was so easy when only the sufferings of others required it, he now finds to be difficult when called on to practise it himself. He has sometimes wondered at their impatience, he is now humbled at his own. He will not only try to bear patiently the pains he actually suffers, but will recollect gratefully those from which he has been delivered, and which he may have for-

merly found less supportable than his present sufferings.

In the extremity of pain he feels there is no consolation but in humble acquiescence in the divine will. It may be that he can pray but little, but that little will be fervent. He can articulate perhaps not at all, but his prayer is addressed to one who sees the heart, who can interpret its language, who requires not words but affections. A pang endured without a murmur, or only such an involuntary groan as nature extorts, and faith regrets, is itself a prayer.

If surrounded with all the accommodations of affluence, let him compare his own situation with that of thousands, who probably with greater merit, and under severer trials, have not one of his alleviations. When invited to the distasteful remedy, let him reflect how many perishing fellow creatures may be pining for that remedy, to whom it might be restorative, or who, fancying that it might be so, suffer additional distress from their inability to procure it.

In the intervals of severer pain he will turn his few advantages to the best account. He will make the most of every short respite. He will patiently bear with little disappointments, little delays, with the awkwardness or accidental neglect of his attendants, and, thankful for general kindness, he will accept good will instead of perfection. The suffering Christian will be grateful for small reliefs, little alleviations, short snatches of rest. To him, abated pain will be positive pleasure. The freer use of limbs which had nearly lost their activity, will be enjoyments. Let not the reader who is rioting

In all the madness of superfluous health,

think lightly of these trivial comforts. Let him not despise them as not worthy of gratitude, or as not capable of exciting it. He may one day, and that no distant day, be brought to the same state of debility and pain. May he experience the mercies he now derides, and may he feel higher comforts on safe grounds!

The sufferer has perhaps often regretted that one of the worst effects of sickness is the selfishness it too naturally induces. The temptation to *this* he will resist, by not being exacting and unreasonable in his requisitions. Through his tenderness to the feelings of others, he will be careful not to add to their distress by any appearance of discontent.

What a lesson against selfishness have we in the conduct of our dying Redeemer!—It was while bearing his cross to the place of execution, that he said to the sorrowing multitude, 'Weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children.' It was while enduring the agonies of crucifixion that he endeavoured to mitigate the sorrows of his mother and of his friend, by tenderly committing them to each other's care.—It was while sustaining the pangs of dissolution, that he gave the immediate promise of heaven to the expiring criminal.

The Christian will review, if able, not only the sins, but the mercies of his past life. If previously accustomed to unbroken health, he will bless God for the long period in which he has enjoyed it. If continued infirmity has been his portion, he will feel grateful that he has had such a long and gradual weaning from the world. From either state he will extract consolation. If pain be new, what a mercy to have hitherto escaped it! If habitual, we bear more easily what we have borne long.

He will review his temporal blessings and deliverances; his domestic comforts, his christian friendships. Among his mercies, his now 'purged eyes' will reckon his difficulties, his sorrows and trials. A new and heavenly light will be thrown on that passage, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' It seems to him as if hitherto he had only heard it with the hearing of his ear, but now his 'eye seeth it.' If he be a real Christian, and has had enemies, he will always have prayed for them, but now he will be thankful for them. He will the more earnestly implore mercy for them as instruments which have helped to fit him for his present state. He will look up with holy gratitude to the great Physician, who by a divine chemistry in making up events, has made that one unpalatable ingredient, at the bitterness of which he once revolted, the very means by which all other things have worked together for good; had they worked separately they would not have worked efficaciously.

Under the most severe visitations, let us compare, if the capacity of comparing be allowed us, our own sufferings with the cup which our Redeemer drank for our sakes—drank to avert the divine displeasure from us. Let us pursue the comparative view of our condition with that of the son of God. He was deserted in his most trying hour; deserted probably by those whose limbs, sight, life, he had restored, whose souls he had come to save. We are surrounded by unwearied friends; every pain is mitigated by sympathy, every want not only relieved but prevented; the 'asking eye' explored; the inarticulate sound understood; the ill-expressed wish anticipated; the but suspected want supplied. When *our* souls are 'exceeding sorrowful,' *our* friends participate our

sorrow; when desired 'to watch' with us, they watch not 'one hour,' but many, not falling asleep, but both flesh and spirit ready and willing; not forsaking us in our 'agony,' but sympathizing where they cannot relieve?

Besides this, we must acknowledge with the penitent malefactor, 'we indeed suffer justly, but this man hath done nothing amiss.' We suffer for our offences the inevitable penalty of our fallen nature. He bore *our* sins and those of the whole human race. Hence the heart rending interrogation, 'Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.'

How cheering in this forlorn state to reflect that he not only suffered for us then, but is sympathizing with us now; that 'in all our afflictions he is afflicted.' The tenderness of the sympathy seems to add a value to the sacrifice, while the vastness of the sacrifice, endears the sympathy by ennobling it.

If the intellectual powers be mercifully preserved, how many virtues may now be brought into exercise which had either lain dormant, or been considered as of inferior worth in the prosperous day of activity. The christian temper indeed seems to be that part of religion which is more peculiarly to be exercised on a sick bed. The passive virtues, the least brilliant, but the most difficult, are then particularly called into action. To *suffer* the whole will of God on the tedious bed of languishing, is more trying than to perform the most shining exploit on the theatre of the world. The hero in the field of battle has the love of fame as well as patriotism to support him. He knows that the witnesses of his va-

lour will be the heralds of his renown. The martyr at the stake is divinely strengthened. Extraordinary grace is imparted for extraordinary trials. His pangs are exquisite, but they are short. The crown is in sight, it is almost in possession. By faith 'he sees the heavens opened. He sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.' But to be strong in faith, and patient in hope, in a long and lingering sickness, is an example of more general use and ordinary application, than even the sublime heroism of the martyr. The sickness is brought home to our feelings, we see it with our eyes, we apply it to our hearts. Of the martyr we read, indeed, with astonishment. Our faith is strengthened, and our admiration kindled; but we read it without that special approbation, without that peculiar reference to our own circumstances, which we feel in cases that are likely to apply to ourselves. With the dying friend we have not only a feeling of pious tenderness, but there is also a community of interests. The certain conviction that his case must soon be our own, makes it our own now. Self mixes with the social feeling, and the christian death we are contemplating we do not so much admire as a prodigy, as propose for a model. To the martyr's stake we feel that we are not likely to be brought. To the dying bed we must inevitably come.

Accommodating his state of mind to the nature of his disease, the dying Christian will derive consolation in any case, either from thinking how forcibly a sudden sickness breaks the chain which binds him to the world, or how gently a gradual decay unties it. He will feel and acknowledge the necessity of all he suffers to wean him from life. He will admire the divine goodness which commissions the

infirmities of sickness to devest the world of its enchantments, and to strip death of some of its most formidable terrors. He feels with how much less reluctance we quit a body exhausted by suffering than one in the vigour of health.

Sickness, instead of narrowing the heart—its worst effect on an unrenewed mind, enlarges his. He earnestly exhorts those around him to defer no act of repentance, no labour of love, no deed of justice, no work of mercy, to that state of incapacity in which he now lies.

How many motives has the christian to restrain his murmurs! Murmuring offends God both as it is injurious to his goodness, and as it perverts the occasion which God has now afforded for giving an example of patience. Let us not complain that we have nothing to do in sickness, when we are furnished with the opportunity as well as called to the duty of resignation; the duty indeed is always ours, but the occasion is now more eminently given. Let us not say even in this depressed state that we have nothing to be thankful for. If sleep be afforded, let us acknowledge the blessing; if wearisome nights be our portion, let us remember they are 'appointed to us.' Let us mitigate the grievance of watchfulness, by considering it as a sort of prolongation of life; as the gift of more minutes granted for meditation and prayer. If we are not able to employ it to either of these purposes, there is a fresh occasion for exercising that resignation which will be accepted for both.

If reason be continued, yet with sufferings too intense for any religious duty, the sick christian may take comfort that the business of life was accomplished, before the sickness began. He will not be

terrified if duties are superseded, if means are at an end, for he has nothing to do but to die.—This is the act for which all other acts, all other duties, all other means, will have been preparing him. He who has long been habituated to look death in the face, who has often anticipated the agonies of dissolving nature; who has accustomed himself to pray for support under them, will now feel the blessed effect of those petitions which have long been treasured in heaven. To those anticipatory prayers he may perhaps now owe the humble confidence of hope in this inevitable hour. Habituated to the contemplation, he will not, at least, have the dreadful additions of surprise and novelty to aggravate the trying scene. It has long been familiar to his mind, though hitherto it could only operate with the inferior force of a picture to a reality. He will not however have so much scared his imagination by the terrors of death, as invigorated his spirit by looking beyond them to the blessedness which follows. Faith will not so much dwell on the opening grave as shoot forward to the glories to which it leads. The hope of heaven will soften the pangs which lie in the way to it. On heaven then he will fix his eyes rather than on the awful intervening circumstances. He will not dwell on the struggle which is for a moment, but on the crown which is forever. He will endeavour to think less of death than of its conqueror; less of the grave than of its spoiler; less of the body in ruins than of the spirit in glory; less of the darkness of his closing day than of the opening dawn of immortality. In some brighter moments, when viewing his eternal redemption drawing nigh, as if the freed spirit had already burst its prison walls, as if the manumission had actually taken place, he is ready

exultingly to exclaim, ' My soul is escaped, the snare is broken, and I am delivered.'

If he ever inclines to wish for recovery, it is only that he may glorify God by his future life, more than he has done by the past; but as he knows the deceitfulness of his heart, he is not certain that this would be the case, and he therefore does not wish to live. Yet should he be restored, he humbly resolves, in a better strength than his own, to dedicate his life to the restorer.

But he suffers not his thoughts to dwell on life. Retrospections are at an end. His prospects as to this world are at an end also. He commits himself unreservedly to his heavenly Father. But though secure of the port, he may still dread the passage. The Christian will rejoice that his rest is at hand, the man may shudder at the unknown transit. If faith is strong, nature is weak. Nay, in this awful exigence, strong faith is sometimes rendered faint through the weakness of nature.

At the moment when his faith is looking round for every additional confirmation, he may rejoice in those blessed certainties, those glorious realizations which scripture affords. He may take comfort that the strongest attestations given by the apostles to the reality of the heavenly state, were not conjectural. They, to use the words of our Saviour, spake what they knew and testified what they had seen. ' I reckon,' says St. Paul, ' that the afflictions of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.' He said this *after* he had been caught up into the third heaven; *after* he had beheld the glories to which he alludes. The author of the Apocalyptic vision, having described the ineffable glories of the new Jerusalem, thus puts new

life and power into his description.—'I John *saw* these things, and *heard* them.'

The power of distinguishing objects increases with our approach to them. The Christian feels that he is entering on a state where every care will cease, every fear vanish, every desire be fulfilled, every sin be done away, every grace perfected: where there will be no more temptations to resist, no more passions to subdue, no more insensibility to mercies, no more deadness in service, no more wandering in prayer, no more sorrows to be felt for himself, nor tears to be shed for others. He is going where his devotion will be without languor, his love without alloy, his doubts certainty, his expectation enjoyment, his hope fruition. All will be perfect, for God will be all in all.

From God he knows that he shall derive immediately all his happiness. It will no longer pass through any of those channels which now sully its purity. It will be offered him through no second cause which may fail, no intermediate agent which may deceive, no uncertain medium which may disappoint. The felicity is not only certain, but perfect,—not only perfect, but eternal.

As he approaches the land of realities, the shadows of this earth cease to interest or mislead him. The films are removed from his eyes. Objects are stripped of their false lustre. Nothing that is really little any longer looks great. The mists of vanity are dispersed. Every thing which is to have an end appears small, appears nothing. Eternal things assume their proper magnitude, for he beholds them in the true point of vision. He has ceased to lean on the world, for he has found it both a reed and a spear; it has failed and it has pierced him. He leans

not on himself, for he has long known his weakness. He leans not on his virtues, for they can do nothing for him. Had he no better refuge he feels that his sun would set in darkness; his life close in despair.

But he knows in whom he has trusted, and therefore knows not what he should fear. He looks upward with holy but humble confidence to that great Shepherd, who having long since conducted him into green pastures,—having by his rod corrected, and by his staff supported him, will, he humbly trusts, guide him through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and safely land him on the peaceful shores of everlasting rest.

The following 'Thoughts in a place of worship, by a Female,' are attributed to the same authoress as the preceding.

And here we come and sit, time after time,
And call it social worship;—Is it thus?
Oh Thou! whose searching, all-pervading eye
Scans every secret movement of the heart,
And sees us as we are—Why mourns my soul
On these occasions?—Why so dead and cold
My best affections? I have found Thee oft
In my more secret seasons—in the fields,
And in my chamber;—even in the stir
Of outward occupations has my mind
Been drawn to Thee, and found Thy presence sweet:
But here I seek in vain, and rarely find
Thy ancient promise to the few that wait
In singleness upon Thee, reach to us.

Most sweet it is to feel the unity
Of soul-cementing love gathering in one—
Flowing from heart to heart, and like a cloud
Of mingled incense rising to the Throne
Of LOVE ITSELF! Then much of heaven is felt
By minds drawn thitherward, and closely link'd
In the CELESTIAL UNION: 'tis in this
Sweet element alone that we can live
To any purpose, or expect our minds
Clothed with that covering which alone prepares
For social worship. Therefore mourns my soul
In secret; and like one amidst the vast
And widely peopled earth, would seek to hide
Myself and sorrows from the motley crowd
Of human observation.—But, Oh Thou!
Whose bowels of compassion never fail
Towards the creatures fashioned by thy hands—
Reanimate the dead, and give to those
Who never felt Thy presence in their souls,
Nor saw Thy beauty, both to *see* and *feel*
That Thou art lovely, and Thy presence life!
Restore the wanderer, and support the weak
With Thy sustaining arm; for *strength is Thine!*
And Oh! preserve this tempest beaten bark
From sinking in the wave, whose swelling surge
Threatens to overwhelm. Forsake her not,
But be her Pilot, though no sun nor star
Appear amid the gloom; for if a ray
From thy all-cheering presence light her course,
She rides the storm secure, and in due time
Will reach her destined port, and be at Peace.

END OF VOLUME V.